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BOR blasts 'power play' vs NMC's Fernandez. PAGE 2

Goat Island eyed as relocation site for Tinian birds. PAGE 5

NMI posts higher agricultural sales in '07—census

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

Total sales from sweet potatoes, bananas, cabbage, betel nuts, milk, poultry and eggs, fish, livestock, ornamental plants and all other agricultural products reached $2.409 million in 2007, a 5-percent increase from the $2.287 million sold in 2002, according to the 2007 Census of Agriculture of the CNMI.

The 37-page census, released last week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is the leading source of statistics about the CNMI's agricultural production and the

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RELATED NEWS

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UNDER OBAMA'S STIMULUS PACKAGE

NMI taxpayers to get credit

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

Like other Americans, CNMI resident taxpayers will be receiving a little extra money from the federal government this year.

Sablan

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, taxpayers in the Commonwealth will receive a tax credit of up to $400 for individuals and $800 for couples. The U.S. Congress passed the Act, commonly referred to as

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After years of operation, the famous Caesar Sauna along Beach Road in Garapan has closed it doors and the property is now "for rent and sale" as this banner reads.
HAIDEE V. EUGENIO

'Difficult, if possible, to waive green card fee'

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

Delegate Gregorio "Kilili" C. Sablan yesterday said he has started working on legislation to help waive the green card fee for immediate relatives of U.S. citizens who face losing their status by June 1 when the federal government takes over local immigration.

"It's going to be very difficult, if possible. It's still going

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MVA: Other markets can't offset loss of Russian visitors

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

The Marianas Visitors Authority will be hard-pressed to replace tourists from Russia once the CNMI's control of immigration is federalized by June 1, 2009.

In a presentation to the Legislature last week, the Commonwealth's tourism agency disclosed that a single Russian

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Local

BOR blasts 'power play' vs NMC's Fernandez

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

Northern Marianas College Board of Regents chair Charles V. Cepeda yesterday expressed disappointment over the rash of allegations concerning NMC president Dr. Carmen Fernandez, describing the move as a power play by some members of the Legislature.

Cepeda came to the president's defense after she was bombarded by criticisms that primarily focused on her management style and hiring practices at the college.

"The Board of Regents, especially myself, stand firm against the attempts to circumvent the current NMC policies in place for exactly these kinds of grievances," Cepeda said in a statement, adding that everybody is going to be in a difficult situation if they favor indirect and hidden agenda.

Cepeda described the criticisms against the president as something that usually occurs in any organization. "I believe that any organization that has one individual with such strong personality will have members of that organization or community who will not be happy and would criticize strongly, most especially here in the CNMI where we are all closely related or see each other daily," Cepeda said.

Last week, the campus faculty staff senate admitted to *Saipan Tribune* that dissatisfaction is high among faculty and employees at the college.

Cepeda, in the statement, pointed out that the faculty staff senate could seek and present a petition for Fernandez's removal if they are unhappy with her. "The Board of Regents would certainly accept the petition, but it would be unrestricted and non-binding."

Cepeda said the faculty senate, if organized behind a worthy cause, is an extremely powerful group within the NMC community and can make a powerful statement.

Cepeda will call for a meeting this month where he invited members of the Legislature and the community to hear their thoughts about these concerns.

The chairman, meantime, reminded that this time is very critical and important for NMC's accreditation, which was put on continued show-cause until April 1.

"The news we've received from WASC this last Feb. 4, 2009, indicates that a lot of work has been done to possibly getting reaffirmed. These media reports are certainly being reviewed by the accreditation commission, some whom have visited the CNMI several times and are aware of the circumstances. There are a couple [of] commission members who have strong ties to the CNMI and are aware of the political interference that our Legislature is accustomed to. These will not [affect] NMC's accreditation for the future," Cepeda added.

Cepeda

Fernandez

NMC 'partially' complies with two remaining recommendations

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges has clarified that it placed the Northern Marianas College on continued show-cause status, not because the institution failed to implement its recommendations, but rather to give NMC more time to complete the requirements for accreditation.

WASC said that NMC has until April this year to fulfill the requirements for team recommendations 1 and 2, which are the only items remaining in the original six areas highlighted as concerns of the accrediting body.

In a 12-page show-cause visit report obtained by Saipan Tribune, it was disclosed that the institution has made great progress in addressing the commission's concerns.

Team recommendation 1 states that NMC should review existing planning processes in order to establish and implement a shared vision for the future of the college with agreed upon priorities.

"The college has partially implemented this recommendation. Momentum has been established which must be accelerated and completed to move NMC from the development to a proficiency level of the rubric," the confidential report stated, adding that the structure, processes, and cycle for a sustainable, integrated planning model that includes an evaluation component and is implemented continuously must be completed and monitored by appropriate governance groups.

The commission also emphasized the active participation by the faculty in these processes.

Based on the team's findings and analysis, NMC completed several planning and program review activities in a short period of time, and in many instances, planning and actions occurred almost simultaneously to meet the college's self-imposed deadline, which was established to comply with the accreditation recommendation and visit.

For team recommendation 2, it said the college must institutionalize a coordinated, systematic process for evaluating program effectiveness

"[NMC] partially implemented this recommendation. Once the databases are fully developed and systematically

See NMC on Page 4

'NMC to get its share in federal stimulus plan'

By MONETH G. DEPOSA
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REPORTER

Besides the Public School System, the Northern Marianas College will also get a portion of the funds intended for CNMI education from President Obama's stimulus economic package plan, according to CNMI Delegate Gregorio Sablan.

However, compared to the public schools, the islands' lone tertiary institution's share will be limited to trainings and programs that would help build the local workforce and local capacities.

"NMC will also get a share [from the stimulus package]. However, this will not be as big as what PSS is expecting to receive," Sablan told *Saipan Tribune* yesterday.

The CNMI delegate to Congress said the "millions of funds" to be provided to the CNMI was a result of the good efforts of the U.S. education committee headed by Rep. George Miller. "I am very grateful to Congressman Miller," he told *Saipan Tribune*.

NMC recently suspended its apprenticeship program due to a funding shortfall. Other certificate programs considered inactive were also put on hold.

Although the intended funds for NMC is not that big, Sablan is confident that it would help address some of the college's needs in terms of trainings and workshops.

Saipan Tribune learned that Sablan, who is on island for a week, will meet with PSS and Board of Education officials on Wednesday, Feb. 18.

In an interview yesterday, BOE vice chairman Herman T. Guerrero disclosed that PSS has yet to make a plan for the upcoming stimulus assistance.

"Until we know fully well the specifics on how we are going to use these funds [based on the intent of the bill], PSS cannot plan at this time," he said.

New elementary and high schools are being proposed for Kagman and Marpi under the 7-Year Strategic Plan of PSS.

However, citing the limitations of the stimulus bill's purpose, Guerrero is not convinced that the stimulus money can be used for building these new schools.

"We need to figure it out… and [that's] the reason [why] we want to meet with the congressman. To ask some specific details about these funds," he said.

PSS is presently operating on a $35 million budget, covering both personnel and "all others" expenses.

Guerrero believes that more CNMI children will benefit from the assistance through various programs.

PSS earlier expressed its wish to expand some programs like Kindergarten and special education. However, limited funding prevented PSS from doing so.

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OPA hiring 11 auditors, other senior employees

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
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REPORTER

The understaffed Office of the Public Auditor is now in the process of hiring 11 employees.

Among those needed are four audit managers, three senior auditors, two audit supervisors and two audit managers.

OPA has advertised the positions on its website, www.opacnmi.com/jobs.html.

Currently, OPA has only 18 employees, including eight auditors, four investigators, a legal counsel and an investigator assigned to a local task force on government corruption, another legal counsel and three administrative staff.

Public Auditor Michael Pai earlier said OPA is authorized to have up to 30 fulltime employees.

OPA offers auditors an annual salary of $33,000 to $42,000, depending on the candidate's qualification. They are to perform assigned financial, operational, compliance audits, and other engagements. OPA auditors are also required to conduct or assist in preliminary surveys, prepare audit programs, determine audit procedures to be used, and perform various audit assignments or special audit projects, among other things.

Auditor applicants must be a graduate of an accredited college or university with a bachelor's degree in accounting, or a non-accounting bachelor's degree, plus one-year audit or accounting experience.

Also needed are senior auditors, with an annual salary of $37,000 to 46,000, depending on the applicant's qualification. A senior auditor plans and executes assigned financial, operational, compliance audits and other engagements, as well as leads other audit staff on a project basis or as requested. Among the qualifications needed is a bachelor's degree in accounting or a non-accounting bachelor's degree, plus six years audit or accounting experience.

OPA offers $43,000 to $54,000 in annual salary to audit supervisors, depending on the applicants' qualification. An audit supervisor functions as lead or specialist with ongoing responsibility for planning and supervising the work of other auditors, and/or contributing technical expertise in a specialized area, and plans and executes sensitive and/or more complex assigned financial, operational, compliance and/or information systems audit, among other things.

Candidates for audit supervisor are required to have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, plus eight years audit experience.

OPA is also looking for audit managers for an annual salary of $50,000 to 60,000, to manage internal audit activity under the direction of the public auditor, and plan and supervise work of other auditors. Candidates are required to have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, plus 10 years audit experience.

According to OPA, interested individuals may inquire by sending e-mail to jobs@opacnmi.com or send completed application for employment form and other documents by fax to the Office of Personnel Management at (670) 234-1013.

Kilili sponsors his first 2 bill in Congress

By KRISTI EATON
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REPORTER

CNMI Delegate Gregorio "Kilili" Sablan introduced his first two pieces of legislation to the U.S. House of Representatives last week.

H.R. 934 seeks to convey up to three miles of submerged lands to the CNMI, similar to what Guam, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa have in place.

The bill, which Madeleine Bordallo (D-GU) and Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) co-sponsored, has been referred to the Committee on Natural Resources.

Ideally, Sablan said he would like more than three miles but said he needed to start somewhere. But, he added, the legislation will go through and the CNMI will have the same status as other coastal states and territories, excluding Puerto Rico and the Florida Gulf Coast, which have nine miles.

Sablan

"At the same time, I will attach myself to other efforts done by chairwoman Donna Christensen and other efforts made where they will extend three to more, some say 12, some say 20, miles. I will attach myself to those efforts. But for me, ownership is important but it's not the only thing."

It's important, Sablan said, that the Northern Marianas receive the benefits of the lands.

"We've set our marker," he said. "That's where we start. I thought that was a good beginning."

Sablan's second piece of legislation would increase the number of students the CNMI and American Samoa delegates can appoint to military service academies.

Under H.R. 935 the delegates of the two territories would be able to appoint three students for each cycle of each academy—Military, Navy and Air Force.

Currently, the CNMI can only appoint one every four years. American Samoa can only appoint two students, Sablan said. With this legislation, the two territories will be equal to other jurisdictions. American Samoa Delegate Eni Faleomavaega (D-AS) co-sponsored the measure, which has been referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

Sablan is also working on other legislations, but said he needed to make some final adjustments before commenting on them.

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Juan 'Pan' to resign as Fund's board chair after certification

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Juan "Pan" T. Guerrero says he will step down gladly as Retirement Fund board of trustees chairman as soon as he is certified as a candidate for governor in this year's election.

Guerrero said he is going to comply with the Election Commission's regulations and that once he gets certified as an official candidate for governor, he will step down as Fund board chair.

He said the board just wants to maintain the consistency of Fund policies and decisions because that's the only way to ensure that the Retirement Fund "would be reformed hopefully."

"I just hate to see all the hard work that we put in trying to make sure that the board is consistent on the policies and decisions that we've taken go to nothing," Guerrero told *Saipan Tribune* as he emerged from the Superior Court Friday afternoon where he attended a hearing in the Fund's lawsuit against Gov. Benigno Fitial and the Department of Finance.

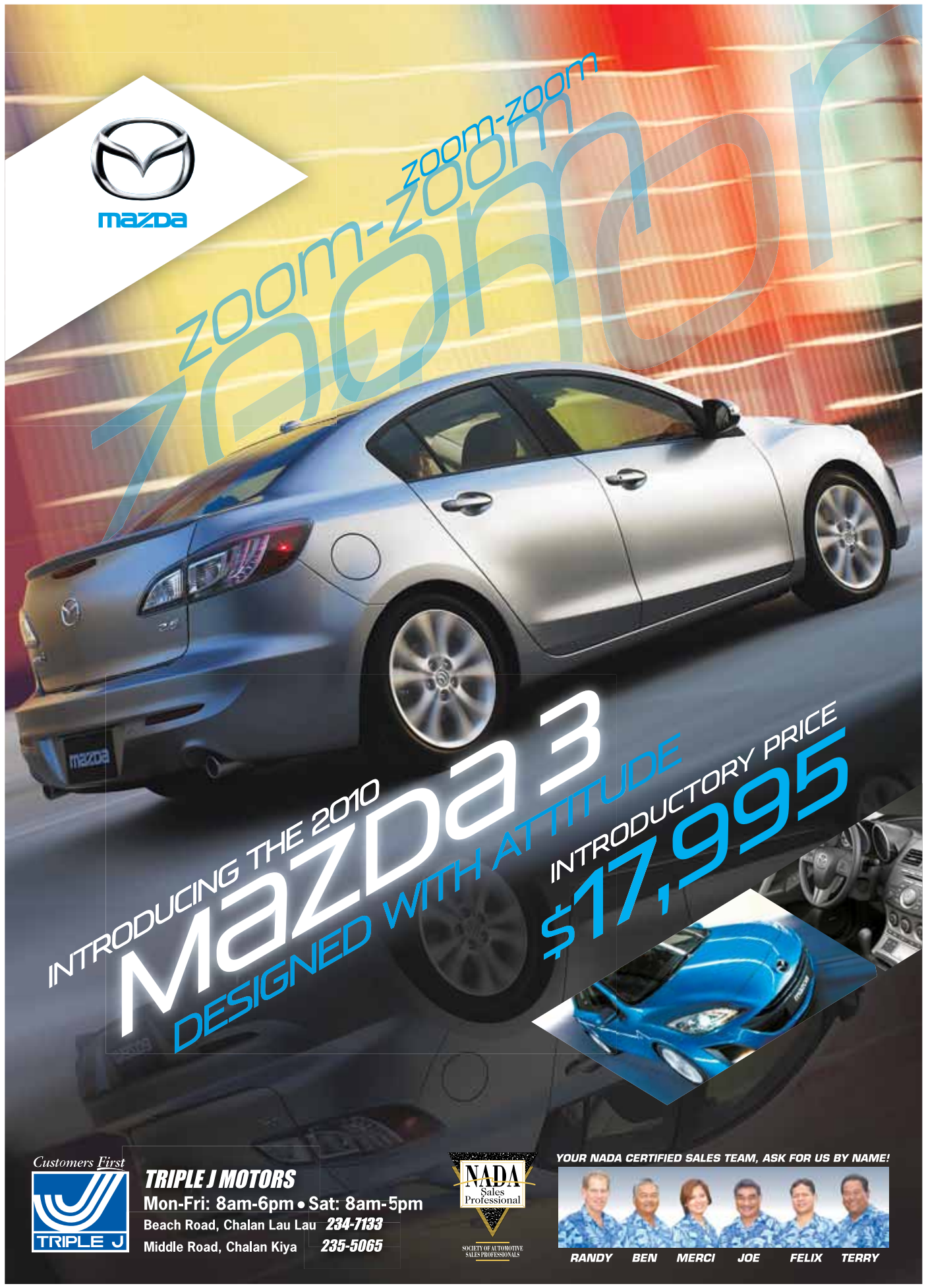
Guerrero pointed out that resolving the Fund's problem is a commitment and a constitutional matter.

" It is not being a governor. It is what the Constitution says, that we cannot diminish the benefit of the pension" he said.

Guerrero said he doesn't believe that, if elected governor, he has the right to take away money that Fund members are entitled to.

"That's the contractual rights. Those guys up there [Capital Hill] don't understand and I'm sorry for that. But that's a contractual right for the employees. …With the limited resources, we just have to balance and make sure that we get, if possible, the most of it," Guerrero added.

Guerrero has also expressed confidence that he will be the next governor.



MVA

From Page 1

tourist is equal to an average of 3.7 visitors from other markets.

MVA said this is because Russian visitors typically spend more and stay much longer than packaged tourists from the other markets.

Extrapolating on these numbers, MVA said the estimated Fiscal Year 2009 arrivals of 9,267 Russian tourists is the economic equivalent of about 34,288 package tourists from Japan, Korea and China.

Due to the expected decline in air services from Korea, Japan, and the exclusion of Russia and China markets from the U.S. visa waiver program, MVA's estimates a drop of 25,956 in visitor arrivals this fiscal year, resulting in a decline of $2.8 million in hotel revenue and a drop of $8.2 million in total financial impact on the island.

MVA officials also estimated that arrivals in FY 2009 will total 330,068 from all markets. These include Japan with 203,663, Korea with 85,870; China with 31,267; and Russia with 9,267.

The total arrivals will bring hotel revenue up to $57 million as well as $229 million for island expenditure, which revs up the total fiscal impact to $939 million.

Compared to actual FY 2008 arrivals of 356,024 from the same markets, hotel revenue recorded by these tourists was $59.9 million; $229 million for island expenditures; and total fiscal impact amounting to $948.2 million.

In the last fiscal year, MVA recorded 202,041 arrivals from Japan, 116,710 from Korea, 31,095 from China, and 6,178 tourists from Russia.

Japan air service

MVA officials disclosed that estimated annual seats from Japan with no cancellation will total 320,804, based on thrice weekly flights for 24 weeks per year as currently scheduled.

However due to the pending cancellation of air seats from Osaka and the downgrade of aircraft from A330 to B757, MVA estimate that only 238,076 seats remain for the CNMI on an annual basis. MVA reported that a total of 82,728 seats will be lost due to these decisions.

The CNMI has two flights from Osaka, two from Narita, and one from Nagoya.

Based on a load factor of 75 percent, the direct economic impact of lost seats from Japan will amount to $51.3 million in FY 2009, or $108.7 million on an annual basis.

The indirect economic impact, however, will total $168.1 million in FY 2009 and $356 million on an annual basis.

Fewer Koreans, other markets

Asiana Airlines' downgrading of the aircraft it uses for flights to Saipan—from 298-seat capacity to only 182 seats—will also mean a direct economic impact loss of $17.3 million this fiscal year while indirect impact will amount to $56.8 million annually.

The Russians' exclusion from the visa waiver program, meanwhile, is projected to incur a loss of about $49 million in direct economic impact in FY 2009 or $78.7 million on an annual basis, while indirect impact is seen to clock in at $108.9 million this fiscal year, or $184.5 million annually.

MVA said the overall negative economic impact this fiscal year is $117.7 million directly and $333.8 million indirectly.

On an annual basis, the overall direct economic effect is at $204.7 million and $597.4 million indirectly.

MVA officials also disclosed the anticipated loss of air seats and air service from various destinations will have a greater impact on the jobs of people both in public and private sectors.

The agency estimated that a total of 5,078 jobs may be lost—2,398 in public and 2,680 in the private sector—due to the decline in tourist arrivals.

NMC

From Page 2

used, the analysis of student learning outcomes assessment results will be more meaningful," the report stated.

It added that with a more data-based analysis component to the program review process, more informed decisions or curriculum, and educational program and services can be achieved.

The team cited that staff training on all facets of program review and student learning outcomes needs to continue to maintain the dialogue and the institutional work accomplished to date.

"The college appears to understand it needs to step back and determine what was accomplished in the first cycle and then it should evaluate the outcomes using agreed upon criteria and begin the next annual cycle. …Since this whole process was begun a year ago, time has been a limiting factor to fully implement the process," the team stated in the report.

NMC's fate will be known in June in time for the commission's next assembly.

The following were the reports submitted by the college to reaffirm its accreditation to the body: a progress report last March 2008; a self-study report in October; and a supplemental report in December.

NMC emphasized that throughout the duration of the show-cause period, the college remains accredited and credits are transferable.

DIFFICULT

From Page 1

to be difficult to get it through Congress but I am going to try real hard," he said.

The United Workers Movement NMI is currently circulating a petition requesting the federal government to waive the green card application fee for immediate relatives of U.S. citizens who reside in the CNMI. The petition has so far gathered over 100 signatures, according to its acting president, Rabby Syed.

Syed said they will seek support from Sablan to get their petition to the federal government.

Sablan said under the Immigration and Nationality Act, a request for a waiver is considered on an individual basis.

"I'm at the same time aware that it is expensive for some people here to apply and pay for the cost of petitioning [for a green card]. The larger problem is for many people here to meet the 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold to be eligible to petition [their relatives] for an immigrant status. We have drafted legislation; we just haven't cleared it to introduce it," he added.

In a Feb. 9 letter to Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, Sablan said a 180-day delay in the implementation of the federalization law will provide more time to find a workable solution on this issue.

The CNMI has a family-based immigration status for immediate relatives—children, spouses and parents—of U.S. citizens and citizens of Freely Associated States. But the transition to federal immigration presents a problem for IRs and their families. The U.S. has no equivalent visa, and many IRs are not eligible for any U.S. visas.

The nearest equivalent visa to the IR visa, for example, would require U.S. citizen members of these families to petition for permanent resident visas for their children, spouses or parents. This will be difficult both in terms of cost and meeting income thresholds.

Syed said a green card application costs more than $3,000, and a sponsor with two household members must have an annual income of at least $17,500 based on the 2008 poverty guidelines, which he described as impossible to meet, given that the minimum wage in the CNMI is only $4.05 an hour.

Sablan said he is aware of the concerns of IRs of U.S. citizens.

"What I'm doing is showing Congress that there are human faces to this issue, not statistics. A thousand families in a community like ours is a large percentage," Sablan said yesterday.

He said Congress may schedule a hearing for March to receive reports from the Department of Homeland Security on the status of its implementation of Public Law 110-229.

TAXPAYERS

From Page 1

the stimulus package, last week. President Obama is expected to sign it on Tuesday while in Denver, Colorado.

The credit is refundable, meaning those who owe less tax than that amount will still receive the full amount, said CNMI Delegate Gregorio "Kilili" Sablan.

"Refundability means that if you owe $300 in taxes and are eligible for a $400 credit, you will not have to pay the $300 in taxes, plus you will get a check for the extra $100," he said.

Instead of waiting to fill out the 2009 tax returns, taxpayers may adjust the money being withheld from their paychecks in order to begin receiving the benefit immediately, Sablan said.

Non-resident aliens, single taxpayers earning more than $75,000 or couples with combined earnings of more than $150,000 are not eligible for the tax credit.

A one-time cash payout of $250 is also available for adults receiving Social Security benefits, veteran's compensation or pension benefits. People receiving Supplemental Security Income are also eligible. The payments are expected by mid-June.

The U.S. Treasury would pay the local government an amount equal to the cost of the credits for the Northern Marianas, Sablan said.

In addition to the tax credit and other grants like the Pell grant, the CNMI could receive as much as $96 million in new federal funds, as part of the $787 billion package.

Sablan, along with delegates from the other insular areas, had pushed for a package of $536 million for the territories to be distributed by the Department of the Interior. That effort was unsuccessful, so now the CNMI must compete with other areas for the money.

"If we don't [compete for] this money, it's going to be taken away and given to someone else," he said. "So our government here must do everything it can to get its share."

The CNMI delegate urged Gov. Benigno Fitial to bring in someone whose sole responsibility is to apply for and obtain all possible funding.

Governors across the nation are hiring people in order to get the maximum funding, he said, citing the state of Massachusetts as an example. Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick hired a real estate development president to oversee that state's stimulus money.

Over the weekend, press secretary Charles P. Reyes Jr. said Fitial agrees that the money must be used quickly and appreciates Sablan's support.

"The administration is committed to making full use of available federal funds for the CNMI's maximum benefit," Reyes said.

He added that Fitial instructed Executive Branch departments during the last Cabinet meeting to quickly comply with federal fund requirements.

NMI

From Page 1

only source of consistent, comparable data at the island level.

Highlighting the report are crop production data, crop and livestock sales, and expense data for calendar year 2007.

"Census statistics are used to measure agricultural production and to identify trends in an ever changing agricultural sector," Cynthia Z.F. Clark, administrator of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service, said in the census.

The single heaviest volume of agricultural product to be sold was sweet potato at 352,340 pounds in 2007, a 104 percent increase from only 172,000 pounds five years earlier.

Over 221,595 pounds of taro were also sold, marking a 38 percent increase from only 159,914 pounds during the previous agricultural census.

At the time of the latest census, there were 1,483 hogs and pigs, 1,395 cattle and calves, 6,381 chicken hens at least four months old, and 196,510 chicken eggs, among other livestock, poultry and their products inventoried.

Of the $2.409 million in total sales from agricultural products in 2007, $638,498 was from root crops. This marked a 58 percent increase from only $404,734 sold five years earlier.

Sale from vegetables and melons stood at $631,470, which was a drop from $821,293 sold in 2002.

Fruits and nuts posted a sales increase of 17 percent, from $343,021 to $401,664.

The rest were from nursery crops including ornamental plants ($178,311), livestock ($279,485), poultry and eggs ($214,360), and fish and other aquaculture products ($65,725).

Higher production costs

But the gains in sales of over $122,000 in 2007 were readily offset by increases in farm production expenses.

For example, farms spent $174,561 in machine hire and custom work in 2007 compared to only $62,723 in 2002, a 78 percent increase. Hired farm labor spending reached almost $1 million in 2007, from only $660,891 five years earlier.

From 214 farms surveyed in 2002, the number went up to 256 in 2007. The number of operators is the same as the number of farms.

Of the 256 farms surveyed in the latest census, 128 were located on Saipan, 97 on Rota, and 31 on Tinian.

Surveyed were places from which $1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, in 2007.

Over 72 percent or 184 of the 256 total farm operators in 2007 were Chamorros, followed by Chinese (27), Filipinos (15), Whites (6), Japanese (1), and others (23).

The term "operator" refers to a person who operates a farm, either by doing the work himself or by directly supervising the work. He may be the owner, a member of the owner's household, a hired manager, a tenant, renter, or sharecropper.

Land in farms reached 4,013 acres in 2007, a 70 percent increase from 2,353 acres five years earlier. The census defines land in farms as the amounts of land reported as owned and reported as rented from others that were added together, minus the amount of land reported as rented to others.

The average size of farm also increased by 43 percent -- from 11 acres to 15.7 acres.

Also posting an increase was the size of land irrigated – from only 309 acres in 2002 to 341 acres in 2007.

Cropland harvested stood at 538 acres during the latest census, a slight increase from 529 acres five years earlier. All land from which any crop was harvested is referred to as cropland harvested

The number of farm workers grew by 11 percent during the five-year period, from only 608 to 676.

Sixth agricultural census

The 2007 census is the sixth census of agriculture of the CNMI. The first was taken in 1970 in conjunction with the decennial census, a practice that continued in 1980 and 1990.

The 1997 census was the first agriculture census taken in the CNMI that was not done as part of the population census, and the 2007 Agriculture Census in the CNMI continues the program on the same five-year cycle used for the main U.S. agriculture census.

One of the most important uses of the census data is to justify claims of farmers who may suffer damages and losses due to natural disasters, such as typhoons.

Private industry uses census statistics to provide a more effective production and distribution system for the agricultural community.

A copy of the latest agriculture census can be downloaded from the CNMI Department of Commerce website, www.commerce.gov.mp.

The statistics in the report were collected by personal enumeration from farm operators during January of 2008.

Goat Island eyed as relocation site for Tinian birds

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

In the event the United States pushes through with its plan to use the military reservation area on Tinian, many of the island's wild animals will be affected and dislocated, according to Rep. Edwin Aldan.

To remedy the situation, Aldan said there is a need to propose a workable plan to relocate the wild animals to nearby Aguiguan Island, also known as Goat Island.

The island is a small speck just southwest of Tinian, with some of the best kept dive site secrets in CNMI waters. The 2.7 square mile island is surrounded by sheer, steep cliffs and is very difficult to approach by sea. For this reason, it is the site of the last of the ancient Chamorro resistance to Spanish colonial rule in 1695.

Aguiguan is presently uninhabited. Remains of Japanese farms from the 1930s and war shelters from World War II can still be found, littered with shells and bombs.

Feral goats and pigs are still found at present and the area is proposed as a marine sanctuary. At one time, the goats were hunted down after they began to defoliate the entire island.

Tinian was a major sugarcane growing and processing center but World War II left a denuded forest, said Aldan during a recent tour with newsmen around the island, including at the military reservation area.

The island was captured by U.S. forces in mid-1944 and subsequently what were then the world's longest runways were built. These runways were used to launch U.S. planes for attacks on Japan, including the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Two-thirds of Tinian—over 16,000 acres—is currently leased to the U.S. military and the Navy conducts training operations regularly.

Aldan said that among the birds that are in danger of being dislocated is the Tinian monarch or Chuchurican Tinian, a forest bird endemic to the island.

The Tinian monarch inhabits a variety of forest types on Tinian, including native limestone forests, secondary vegetation consisting primarily of non-native plants, and nearly pure stands of introduced tangantangan (*Leucaena leucocephala*).

It was listed as endangered in 1970 under the authority of the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969 because its population was reported to be critically low due to the destruction of native forests by pre-WWII agricultural practices, and by military activities during WW II.

Forest bird surveys on Tinian in 1982 resulted in a population estimate of 39,338 Tinian monarchs. But it was reclassified from endangered to threatened in 1987.

In 1996, a replication of the 1982 surveys yielded a population estimate of 55,720 birds.

'Elliot was once a bright student who shone in table tennis tilts'

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Eria Elliot used to be a bright, smart, shy student of William S. Reyes Elementary School. In the early 1990s, WSR was a dominant school in table tennis competition in the Public School System. And Elliot was one of WSR's top players.

Retired teacher Val Welch disclosed to *Saipan Tribune* Sunday that Elliot's stepmother is a Palauan, but his real mother is from Kiribati. Welch said Elliot didn't know his mother because he left Kiribati with his father when he was very young. Apparently, Elliot's parents separated. His father took the young boy to Saipan.

Saipan Tribune learned that Elliot's father is a Caucasian who previously worked at the Superior Court.

Welch's wife is from Kiribati and the couple used to help Elliot. There are only a few Kiribatise on the island.

Welch recalled that, back in the early 1990s, PSS used to hold an annual table tennis-all schools championship tournament. At the time, table tennis was a major competitive sport and WSR, under coach Joe Santos, was the dominant school. Elliot was one of the top players. Later in junior high school, Elliot could be seen at the Ada Gym, practicing table tennis many hours every week.

Yet, despite his talents, Elliot was already going in and out of the hospital's psychiatric ward while in high school, Welch said.

He said one of the psychiatrists was frustrated with Elliot's treatment and expressed that something had to be done as they could not just keep him in the hospital all the time. The former teacher said the psychiatrist did not say anything about the problem being related to drugs or alcohol, but stated it was a genetic problem.

In a June 2006 medical report, a psychiatrist, Dr. Willie Gutowski, disclosed that Elliot has been a familiar patient at the Commonwealth Health Center for acute psychosis related to alcohol and marijuana abuse. Gutowski said Elliot suffers from schizophrenia and has auditory hallucinations.

Welch remembered that one time Elliot swam to Managaha Island and stayed there for a week, just living on leftover food. Elliot returned to Saipan on a ferry.

"For a time, he seemed to be in full recovery. He was taking care of himself, he was driving a car, and he was looking for work," he said.

Welch said Elliot became particularly excited when he talked with his mother for the first time on the phone.

"He couldn't speak directly to her because she doesn't understand English and he doesn't speak Kiribati," Welch said.

He said an opportunity to really help Elliot was lost when he was not sent to Kiribati after talking with his mother because at the time, "that was all he could think about."

"In Kiribati he would have family, here [on Saipan] he has no one," Welch said.

Welch said Elliot's father, a carpenter, built his son a canoe with a sail that Elliot would sail inside the reef. The father converted an outrigger canoe into a boat with a small motor that could take four or five people to Managaha.

"Many times Eria [Elliot] would join us on trips we would take on that boat. This contact all happened while Eria was in elementary school," Welch said.

He said when Elliot went to junior high school, they didn't have much contact with him until the shelter for abused women contacted them.

Welch said the shelter informed them that a Kiribati boy was living in very poor conditions and they asked if they could take him in because he didn't qualify to stay in the shelter.

"It was when we took him in that we were able to call his mom," Welch said.

He said the father, who is still on island, had helped Elliot before but he would only "mess up the apartment."

The 28-year-old Elliot has been in and out in jail due to several criminal charges, mostly from assaulting people and disturbing the peace. Judges also issued numerous bench warrants for his arrest for not appearing at court hearings.

Last Tuesday, associate judge David Wiseman issued a bench warrant against Elliot for not appearing in court. The following day, associate judge Ramona V. Manglona also issued a bench warrant against the defendant for non-appearance.

As of yesterday, police have yet to arrest him. At lunch time yesterday, *Saipan Tribune* spotted him again in Garapan doing his regular thing—roaming the streets and entering establishments to ask for food and money from passersby, customers, and tourists.

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'Deportation for alien workers driving illegal taxi'

TINIAN MEETING CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Members of the Tinian Chamber of Commerce meet with John Knox, center, of the U.S. Joint Guam Program Office's Socio-Economic Impact, at the JC Cafe on Feb. 13, 2009.

Alien workers convicted of engaging in illegal taxi operations face immediate deportation from the CNMI, according to chief prosecutor Kevin Lynch.

Lynch said the maximum penalty for operating an illegal taxi is imprisonment of not more than one year or a fine of not more than $2,000 or both. Upon conviction, the defendant will be immediately deported, he said.

The chief prosecutor briefly explained the penalty for committing the offense of illegal taxi operation in the charging information he filed last week against Ming Hu Quan.

Lynch charged the 45-year-old Quan with one count of illegal taxi operation.

He said that on Dec. 5, 2008, the defendant was caught driving a vehicle for rent or hire without having in his possession a valid taxicab driver's license. Lynch said Quan also did not carry a taxicab registration card.

Quan was summoned to appear and answer the allegations in the Superior Court on March 10 at 9am.

Immigration has found that most people driving illegal taxicabs are overstaying aliens.

Meanwhile, Lynch also charged a teenager who allegedly sexually abused a minor in December.

Wendall Dumot Dipus, 19, of Gualo Rai, was charged with one count of sexual abuse of a minor in the second degree.

Lynch stated in court documents that in December 2008, Dipus had sex with a person who is under 13 years old. No other details were indicated in court papers. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

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Labor disqualifies company from hiring alien workers

For not paying a worker his wages, the Department of Labor has barred a corporation and its officers from employing alien workers in the CNMI for five years.

Labor Administrative Hearing Officer Herbert D. Soll disqualified Mars Corp. and its officers and shareholders—Gregorio N. Malit, Margarita Ramon, and Marcilo S. Aquino—from hiring foreign workers.

Soll found Mars Corp. liable to pay alien worker Rodolfo S. Ebdane $7,570.40 in unpaid wages plus liquidated damages in equal amount, for a total of $15,140.80. Soll ordered Mars Corp. to pay the award on or before Feb. 28, 2009.

If the respondent fails to pay this award by Feb. 28, the Labor director has been asked to take all necessary steps to secure payment from the bonding company that provided the security.

Ebdane was allowed to transfer to a new employer. He was required to register with Labor's Division of Employment Services within 30 days.

According to Labor records, Ebdane was employed with Mars Corp. from 2004 to April 2008.

During the course of his employment, Ebdane was not paid according to normal and required payroll procedures. He was merely given a series of advances.

After deducting the amount actually paid—the advances from the total of earned wages—Mars Corp. continues to owe Ebdane the amount of $7,570.40.

At the Labor hearing last Feb. 9, Ebdane was present. Mars Corp. president Malit, vice president Ramon, and treasurer Aquino failed to appear although they were served with notices of the proceeding.

Mars Corp. officers also failed to appear for mediation and then for investigation of the case.

In his administrative order, Soll said that Labor's repeated contacts with Mars Corp. officers through mail and verbal communication were ignored. The corporation, Soll said, was deemed to be in default.

"The failure to pay full wages was willful and liquidated damages in an equal amount will be awarded," the hearing officer said. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

Alleged overstaying alien nabbed

Authorities arrested last week in western Garapan a sales person who has been allegedly overstaying in the CNMI for two years now.

Cangben Shi, 34, male, Chinese, was brought to the Superior Court Friday for a bail hearing after the Division of Immigration filed a deportation case against him.

Associate Judge Ramona V. Manglona imposed a $200 cash bail for Shi's temporary release and ordered him to appear in court on Feb. 26 at 2pm to explain why he should not be deported from the CNMI.

Immigration investigator Nicolas T. Reyes stated in his report that on Wednesday, officers from Immigration, Department of Labor, and Attorney General's Investigation Unit were outside Rui Jin Store in western Garapan, monitoring the activities of suspected illegal aliens.

The officers then saw a white Toyota Corolla car arrive and park in front of them.

A man later identified as Shi boarded the car as a passenger.

Reyes said he approached and learned that Shi was not in possession of any type of identification to verify his immigration status.

Reyes said they later learned that Shi's nonresident worker's entry permit expired on Jan. 25, 2007.

Reyes said the respondent has no pending Labor case and did not file any new request for renewal of his worker's permit.

Labor's records indicate that Shi used to work as a farmer in 2004. His last employment was a sales person for L.X.J. Development Enterprises Inc. in January 2006.

Immigration has lately been actively pursuing suspected overstayers on the island, most of them Chinese. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

Flowers from Kuwait via long distance call to NMI

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

The husbands of Tanya Mesa and Rita Chargualaf may have been thousands of miles away in Kuwait but this did not prevent them from showing their deepest affections to their loved ones back home, especially on Valentine's Day.

It just took a long distance call for Sgt. Peter Mesa to order a bunch of flower from one of the local shops here on Saipan for delivery to his wife, Tanya, on the first hour of Feb. 14.

"He also called to greet me Happy Valentine's Day. He was here last January for rest and recreation," Tanya said.

Staff Sgt. Noel Chargualaf also called his wife Rita to express his love and, just like many members of the Echo Company, he also ordered flowers from a local shop on Saipan for her.

"He also gave our daughter not only flowers but also chocolates," Rita said.

Their 13-year-old daughter Rinel was with friends when somebody handed her the flowers and chocolates and she found out it came from her dad.

"It was so wonderful. He also called to say how much he misses us and told us to continue to pray for their safety in Kuwait," said Rita, who is the leader of the Family Readiness Group on Saipan for the Echo Company.

Mesa and Chargualaf are just two of the wives of around 80 U.S. military servicemen who are stationed with the Echo Company in the Middle East.

Family Fun Day

A total of 156 family members of active military servicemen participated in the first family fun day organized by the American Red Cross NMI Chapter at the Pacific Islands Club last Saturday. The group included some six servicemen who arrived on Feb. 13 for rest and recreation, including one of the team leaders, Thomas Blas.

"We are very grateful to Red Cross for doing this for us," Tanya Mesa said.

Kennedy Benjamin, Red Cross NMI Health and Safety Coordinator, said this was a way of showing appreciation to the military and their family members.

One of FRG's campaign is the Red T-shirt Friday.

"These shirts are for sale and we will wear them on Fridays. The proceeds will go to the American Red Cross to be turned over to the service members only," Benjamin explained.

Written on the shirst is "United We Stand, Support Our Troops."

The first family fun day activity was part of the $20,000 grant from the U.S. Secretary of Department of Defense.

"This kind of grant is a way to give the family members of military servicemen who don't have the opportunity to avail of services like commissary or medical facilities," Benjamin said.

HAIDEE V. EUGENIO

HOUSE VISITORS

U.S. Navy representatives from Pacific Fleet Hawaii led by Edward J. Lynch, third from right, made a presentation at the House of Representatives chamber Friday about the draft Mariana Islands Range Complex environmental impact statement which is up for public comment. From left, Rep. Joe Reyes, U.S. Navy's Robert Wescom, Commander Maureen Chase, Lynch, Nora Macariola-See, and Rep. Tina Sablan.

DEQ offers web based water operator certification testing

The Division of Environmental Quality's Safe Drinking Water Program recently started a web-based water operator certification testing as part of the Water Operator Certification Program.

The CNMI is one of only five states/provinces that conduct the operator certification test via the web-based procedure.

The CNMI, represented by environmental specialist Derek Chambers, recently attended an Association of Boards of Certification conference where he presented drinking water issues.

The certification program is based on ABC standards and uses the ABC certification exam.

Chambers' presentation was on how DEQ administers the test, and how the web-based test has improved services for local water operators.

"CNMI is one of only several states that offer on-line testing for water operators. Many other states would like to offer these exams, but it takes time and effort to change their regulations," said Chambers. "I received many positive comments from conference participants, and many people who said that they now know where the CNMI is!"

The information provided at the conference helps DEQ improve the certification program.

The annual conference was held in La Quinta, California, from Jan. 26 to Feb. 2, 2009. Conference participants included all State and Provincial Environmental Certification programs that use ABC testing services.

The Association of Boards of Certification has been assisting states and provinces with environmental certification programs since 1972. Our membership consists of over 90 certifying authorities representing more than 40 states and 10 Canadian provinces which certify over 150,000 water and wastewater operators, laboratory analysts, and backflow prevention assembly testers. For more information about ABC, visit http://www.abccert.org. ***(DEQ)***

Managaha waters get green flag

The Division of Environmental Quality has assigned a green flag to Managaha's recreational beaches and dock this week after regularly scheduled sampling showed no excessive concentrations of fecal indicator bacteria nor did they exceed the CNMI Marine Water Quality Standards.

The division analyzed a total of 11 samples from the shores surrounding Managaha this week. Marine Water Quality reports are also provided at www.deq.gov.mp/section.aspx?secID=4. One may also receive e-mail notifications of the weekly marine water quality reports. To do so, send an e-mail to environment@deq.gov.mp.

DEQ welcomes all inquiries as to the quality of the beach water. The public is encouraged to contact DEQ at 664-8500 with any questions concerning this matter. ***(DEQ)***

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Give your little sweetheart a free healthy smile!

By LORI SERNA, RDH, MED
SPECIAL TO THE SAIPAN TRIBUNE

Many parents are not sure when to take their little one to the dentist. The American Dental Association recommends that all children visit the dentist's office by their first birthday. There are many benefits that can be gained from bringing the children in at an early age. Unfortunately there is a lot of confusion on what will happen on the first visit and how much the child can really get out of the experience.

Baby teeth or primary teeth are very important. Usually a child gets his/her first teeth when they are between 6-10 months old, and the last baby tooth is lost between the ages of 10-12 years old. It is important then to take care of the baby teeth because they will be in the mouth a long time.

Strong healthy primary teeth help your child chew food easily, learn to speak clearly, smile and look attractive. These teeth also help shape your baby's face and form.

The main threat to children's teeth is caries or dental decay. Bacteria that grow in the mouth can attack the teeth's enamel and create holes that look like little black dots at first. Parents or caregivers need to brush the child's teeth at least twice a day to remove these harmful germs.

By scheduling a visit to the dentist early on you can build a positive relationship between your children and the dentist. In addition to checking for decay and other problems, your dentist will show you how to clean the children's teeth everyday. The dentist or dental hygienist can also answer any questions you might have about bottle feeding, or many habits such as thumb sucking or the use of a pacifier, as well as identifying the need for fluoride. In many instances, the first dental visit is a "well-baby check-up" for the teeth.

HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
Seventh Day Adventist Clinic dental hygienist Lori Serna demonstrates the proper way of brushing the teeth at the Koblerville Elementary School.

During the first visit the dentist or dental hygienist will gently examine the child's teeth and gums, checking for decay and other problems. If your child is comfortable we might be able to clean the teeth and do a fluoride treatment. At the SDA dental clinic we give every child we see a free toothbrush as well as stickers and floss. It is our desire to make the first dental experience as pleasant as possible. At the Seventh - day Adventist clinic we create a positive environment for the entire dental family and work within the child's comfort level.

Parents can prepare the child by telling the child that the dentist is a friendly doctor who will help take care of their teeth. Talk about the visit in a positive, matter-of-fact way, as you would about any other important new experience, such as going to the library or grocery store. A visit to the dentist can be a pleasant adventure for your child.

The Seventh-day Adventist dental clinic is happy to offer free dental exams during the month of February for the children of the CNMI. Call 234-6323 today for an appointment.

Fitial sets meeting with DOI's Salazar

Gov. Benigno Fitial leaves for Washington, D.C. today, where he will meet with new Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

Fitial

Salazar

Salazar, who was appointed by President Obama and confirmed by the Senate, will head Interior, which oversees the insular areas, including the CNMI. The Interior distributes federal funds and grants to the CNMI.

Charles Reyes, press secretary for the Governor's Office, said that during the introductory meeting Fitial would continue to discuss the Commonwealth's priorities and needs.

Fitial, who will return to the CNMI at the end of the month, will also be attending several other functions: the National Governor's Association meeting on Feb. 21 to 23; the Pacific Basin Development Council meeting on Feb. 24; the Interagency Group on Insular Areas meeting on Feb. 24; and the U.S. Coral Reef task Force meeting on Feb. 25. ***(Kristi Eaton)***

Tinian Chamber of Commerce sets election

The Tinian Chamber of Commerce will conduct its election of 2009 officers on Thursday, Feb. 20, at 10:30a., in the Tinian Room at the Tinian Dynasty Hotel and Casino. All members are encouraged to attend.

Applications for membership will be available at the door. Chamber president Don A. Farrell said that only member businesses that have paid the minimum one month due of $10 will be eligible to vote in the election.

Only one vote is allowed for each federal tax identification number, no matter the size of the business. ***(PR)***

BIRTHDAY SHOUT-OUT

Belated birthday greetings go out to Marites Aquino Castillo, who celebrated her birthday yesterday, Feb. 16. May you have many more birthday's to come and may God protect you from all harms. May God bless you always with a good health and may all your dreams come true. God had made you lovingly, carefully, reverently and exactly right! You are precious to us. Always remember that we will always be here for you because we love you very much. Greetings coming from your FMI Group, your husband Bill and your daughters Ciara and Betty.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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DIRECTOR OF CRM

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/s/ **JOHN B. JOYNER, PH.D**
DIRECTOR OF CRM

/s/ **HERMAN S. SABLAN**
DIRECTOR, P&S

Flashback

A LOOK BACK AT PAST YEARS' HEADLINES

February 17, 1999

Reyes urges Tenorio on garment-cap bill

The chair of the Senate Fiscal Affairs Committee yesterday urged Gov. Pedro P. Tenorio to sign the garment cap measure pending before his office to help alleviate the tight financial condition of the CNMI government following continuous drop in revenues. Senate Floor leader Pete P. Reyes maintained the proposed law will generate at least $2 million in additional income for the public coffers which can fund critical agencies in the commonwealth. Likewise, the senator frowned on Tenorio's plan to implement fresh cuts in government spending, including layoff and pay reduction of government personnel, when the administration has yet to exhaust all means to shore up the dwindling revenues.

AG sounds alarm on credit-card fraud

The Office of the Attorney General has warned the public against the purchase of a fake credit card from a Texas-based company which has victimized a number of people since 1996. Credicorp.Inc. of Dallas, Texas has been offering consumers a pre-approved solicitation for a 12 percent gold card with a credit line of $10,000 or more for only $30. "It is a rip-off. It is not a master card, a visa card or an American Express card, just a gold card. You cannot use it unless the supermarket has some kind of an agreement with the company," said Assistant Attorney General David Lochabey. What made the Credicorp offer questionable was the fact that it even accepted consumers who are on the verge of bankruptcy, according to Lochabey, who handles consumer issues at the Attorney General's Office.

February 17, 2000

OPA chides CDA for costly renovation

The Commonwealth Development Authority has allegedly failed to observe prudence as called for by the government-wide cost-cutting program in the renovation of its building in Gualo Rai, according to a preliminary report prepared by the Office of the Public Auditor. According to the draft OPA report, renovation of the structure along Middle Road will eventually increase CDA's monthly rental of the property from $8,000 to $13,489, or a difference of more than $5,000. However, if CDA occupies the building only during the present lease term and does not exercise the five-year option, rental may increase by $19,212 per month to $27,212.

Engineering firm named for $17-M prison

The CNMI government has selected the San Francisco-based architectural and engineering firm of Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum to design the proposed $17 million corrections facility. However, Rep. Heinz Hofschneider , chair of the Prison Task Force, said building a new prison is not the answer to the increasing criminality in the island. In fact, he said the government agencies and service providers must work together to overhaul the criminal justice system to make sure that the prison is not filled with inmates in a year's time. The design of the 344-bed prison facility is expected to be completed in 12 months. Construction is scheduled to begin next year and will be completed in 24 months.

February 17, 2003

MPLA eyes high-rise buildings

The Marianas Public Lands Authority aims to move for the amendment of the Homestead Act so it could pursue new programs such as the construction of high-rise residential buildings rather than individual houses and lots to save land. MPLA commissioner Henry S. Hofschneider said this would call for the amendment of the law to avoid conflicts. "We'd use public lands fund to construct high rises for residential uses.We may need to ask the Legislature to amend the statute," he said. The MPLA has two options in the construction and management of residential buildings. First, the MPLA may decide to build and manage the building. Second, it may build the building but turn it over to the Northern Marianas Housing Corporation for management. "We can construct and manage the housing ourselves, which is not our business, or designate public land for those buildings, and have the Housing Corporation manage it," he said.

Celebrate Student Success With Us

All community members are invited to commemorate TRiO Day at the Northern Marianas College by attending the TRiO Programs Open House on February 18th from 1pm to 6pm.

For many years, TRiO programs (comprising of the Upward Bound Program, the Educational Talent Search Program, and the Student Support Services Program) have helped ever 5,000 students prepare to graduate from high school and institutions of postsecondary education.

In addition to raising awareness of the programs' free services, the TRiO Day event will serve to acknowledge the students, parents/guardians, teachers, and community leaders for their unrelenting support in making the goal of obtaining a degree a reality and a success.

What is TRiO?

The Northern Marianas College's TRiO Programs help students who are first generation college students, come from low-income backgrounds, and have documented disabilities prepare and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education through the following services:

- Workshops
- Seminars
- College life skills activities
- Tutorials
- Personal/academic/career counseling
- Assistance with admissions/financial aid applications

The Educational Talent Search Open House is located in Building I, and the Upward Bound Program and Student Support Services Open Houses are located in Building J.

What is TRiO Day?

According to the 1986 Congressional resolution, National TRiO Day is meant to focus on the nation's "attention of the needs of disadvantaged young people and adults aspiring to improve their lives, to the necessary investment if they are to become contributing citizens of the country, and to the talent which will be wasted if that investment is not made."

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Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER
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EDITORIAL

The first three weeks

If President Obama and his advisers had a magic wand rather than a balky, and balkanized, Congress, the dire recession would still be daunting. But the presidency does not come with a magic wand; nor, we have learned, is Mr. Obama, however talented, a wizard.

The president's admitted mistakes on nominations have served as a reminder that he is, after all, rather new to the game of national politics and the art of balancing the lofty aims of campaign pledges against the real-world demands of governing. The abrupt withdrawal of Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., the president's second choice for commerce secretary, was a painful demonstration of the limits of bipartisanship. The narrow and rushed passage of his stimulus package underscored the difficulty of living up to his grand promises of transparency; the campaign trail talk about not cutting deals behind closed doors yielded to the demands of the moment. And if it was this hard for Mr. Obama to lure Republican votes to spend money, how will he manage to entice Republican support to deal with even more contentious issues, such as climate change or health care?

The immediate challenge for the new administration, one that is harder and more important than the stimulus measure, will be to bring stability to the nation's banking system. On that task, "chastening" is a mild word to apply to Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner's debut of the administration's plan. The president promised that his treasury secretary would offer "very clear and specific plans," after which Mr. Geithner laid out a blueprint only. The result was to undermine both Mr. Geithner, who is abler than he seemed at the rollout, and the plan, which is more promising than its reception would suggest.

Every presidency has its learning curve, and by historical standards Mr. Obama has had more than his share of successes. It did not receive enough notice in the frenzy over the stimulus vote that the Democratic president secured, in addition to the usual suspects, the backing of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers. Mr. Obama already has overseen three major pieces of legislation: the Lilly Ledbetter employment discrimination measure, an expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program and the stimulus package. Not bad for little more than three weeks' work. His reaching out to Republican lawmakers may not have borne immediate fruit, but it planted potentially fertile seeds for future cooperation.

Unfortunately for Mr. Obama and the nation, the current economic situation does not allow for the usual margin of error; fairly or not, he will not be measured against normal historical standards. Sooner rather than later, he will have to find the right balance between reassurance and alarmism; sooner than in past administrations, he needs a full team in place.

See THE FIRST on Next Page

LAND OWNERSHIP CONTROL STIFLES GROWTH, DEV'T

The need to reassess land ownership restriction

By JOSE S. DELA CRUZ
SPECIAL TO THE SAIPAN TRIBUNE

Fifth of a six-part series

After 1995, litigation pertaining to Article 12 issues decreased. About five years ago, the business sector suggested that Article 12 be further amended so that it would allow persons not of NMI descent to acquire a longer leasehold interest of, say, 75 to 99 years. The rationale behind this suggestion is to try to entice new investors to invest in the CNMI and to allow existing investors to extend their lease agreement whose remaining term has diminished over the years. But those in favor of Article 12 and those against its continuation appear to still have the same entrenched position that they have had over the years. The pro-Article 12 side feels that Article 12 is doing just fine and should be left as it is. The anti-Article 12 group still feels that Article 12 is discriminatory, anti-development and infringes on an individual's right to dispose of his property as he/she sees fit.

Before the two sides collide again, it is the intention of this paper to suggest that both sides should approach the Article 12 issue from the perspective of how their respective concerns could best be accommodated. Some of the concerns raised by both sides have merit, and each side could understand and appreciate the other side's concerns. For example, those in favor of retaining Article 12 are very much aware of the extremely poor state of the CNMI economy; and those who are against Article 12 could understand the cultural and social policy objectives of Article 12, namely, to ensure that the indigenous people of the CNMI do not become landless in their own islands. So both sides have compelling arguments in support of their respective position.

The difficult thing to do is finding a mutually acceptable solution that would accommodate the concerns on both sides. In order to do so, we need to begin the Article 12 discussion by taking a realistic look at the present state of affairs that the CNMI is in. The overall situation in the CNMI is very depressing indeed: politically, economically and socially. Faith and confidence in the ability of the CNMI government to handle its own affairs responsibly and to improve the quality of life here has been at an all-time low.

At no time in the history of the CNMI has the local economy been as depressed as what we have been experiencing over the past four years. The real danger is that, unless we begin to turn around the local economy, the CNMI government might become bankrupt soon. In paper, the local government is probably already insolvent. And when the CNMI government in fact actually becomes bankrupt, public service will either be critically compromised, or may even come to a stop. There will not be enough money for public education, and not enough teachers could be hired and paid for. There will not be enough money to operate the hospital and provide essential public health services. The CUC-operated power utility will continue to deteriorate because of lack of money. These eventualities are all very real because there would be very little money to go around. We all know now that the CNMI government treasury is getting dry real fast. Yet, like the Tower of Babel, our leaders are still arguing as the CNMI ship of state founders.

So something has got to give. All of us need to realize that we have to cooperate with each other if we are to survive. We need to help each other in order to get out of the economic quagmire we are in. Fighting each other while the boat is sinking will only be disastrous.

Each side has to realize that we have to compromise and give up something in order to benefit everybody on board. If the pro-Article 12 group feels very strongly that, if the land ownership restriction is removed, somehow many local residents would be tempted to sell their land and eventually become landless in their own island, this concern would have to be addressed and taken into account, because it is not good public policy to have a landless population. For if such landless scenario becomes real, the CNMI government would ultimately end up having to provide housing for the homeless and for those in poverty.

On the other hand, the anti-Article 12 group feels very strongly that each landowner should be able to decide what he wants to do with his private property as he sees fit; and that no government has any right whatsoever to tell him what to do with his property. The arguments on both sides, therefore, have merit, and each would have to be accommodated as much as possible. But the overriding factor at the moment that both sides must realize and address is the depressed economic state that the CNMI is in. This must be immediately addressed and resolved soon; for if our economic predicament is not corrected soon, the CNMI would end up being a ghost town, with the majority of the residents leaving the islands and moving elsewhere.

To be continued.

Jose S. Dela Cruz is a former justice in the CNMI Supreme Court.

EDITORIAL POLICY The *Saipan Tribune* welcomes comments on any article, column, editorial, or topic that may be of interest to the public. Letters to the editor must include the name, address, and contact number of the contributor. Letters that are critical in nature should focus on issues, not personalities. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, CIC Centre, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Letters to the Editor

Show me the money

Stimulus has no direct funding for Guam and CNMI projects and that is the truth. It's really nice for press releases of both Delegates from Guam and the CNMI to the U.S. House of Representatives to say that Guam and the CNMI will get money from the stimulus package. But they are not telling you the truth directly that we must first apply and apply and compete and compete and beg and beg for our shares before we get any. Come on, please stop this nonsense already.

Show us the money! Stop having ambiguous press releases. We have another congressional delegation upon us in Guam. What for? So that they can lay more wreaths at federal parks? Why not lay wreaths on the tombs of those who passed away that have not gotten any benefits from the so-called War Repatriation (delayed) Act. Come on, people of Guam, stop reading published brownie points press releases.

Where is the money to help us with the much delayed Compact impact? We have so much "trash talk" on our island already; we don't need anymore "trash talk" coming in to us. Show us the people Guam and the CNMI in black and white the direct funds and benefits, not some fancy way to go to the Internet and download instructions on how to apply for federal grants and so much red tape in downloading certain programs so that you can read more red tape information. Don't take my word for it, try it for yourself and see what I mean. It's all over the Internet.

Secretary of State Clinton is going to sign the "Guam International Agreement" in Japan. Now that would be nice if we get $1 billion *now* from that agreement for Guam to take care of the War Repatriation Act and help get rid of the "trash talks." That is what you can call the real deal of stimulus funding for Guam. *Ai Adai*, Delegate Bordallo and Delegate Sablan, please, what stimulus? Its called the insular competitive stimulus undirected funding. I can't wait to hear more nice praises from the codel how friendly the people of Guam are and how patriotic we are, etc., etc.

Alfredo O. Antolin, Jr.
Tamuning, Guam

What are you doing to change?

I haven't been back home for about three years. Little did I know how much have really changed. I thought I was educated about the islands' current events by occasionally reading Saipan's online newspapers. How ignorant could I have been? A little more than 24 hours ago, I watched a documentary about Saipan. The video (http://current.com/items/89785807/battle_of_saipan.htm) unveiled a curtain covering my eyes from what had occurred in my island paradise. My unveiled eyes compelled me to believe the divulged events. The video inspired me to step out in faith and get involved. How could I not?

I logged into my Facebook account where I had about 100 acquaintances and friends from Saipan. I highly desired for them to see what I had just seen. I created a group and invited them all. How excited I was to see just a day later that more than 100 young and young at heart adults from my friends' social networks stepping out in faith to believe what I believed in—change. Most importantly, they were believing in change for Saipan. Someone posted: Could this be a grassroots movement for something big? Let's hope so. I hope so, too!

So why am I writing here? I have to be honest that as much as I desire to be the change I want to see in the world and on Saipan, I am not the most experienced, the most intelligent nor the most gifted. I am inclined to believe that I am uncommon, though. I believe in a cause. I believe that Saipan can be different. I believe that it can be as prosperous as it once was, giving others the same prosperity it brought to my family and I. I believe it starts with the individual unit. I am a just a small element—a piece of a greater and bigger *and* better picture. You are a building block, the most valuable piece in the implementation of change. Our individual gifts, talents, experiences and education combined are potential for a dynamic and kinetic explosion of change for the island and eventually the world. How we each value ourselves is what others will see and value. How we see and value our island is what will drive others to return to Saipan. If we undervalue ourselves and talents, surely that will be what others will see.

Saipan is a diamond in the rough, awaiting its gemstone cutter to harness the power that will allow it to be seen as the 100-multi-facetedd brilliant gem that is really is. Do you see what I see? I want to see the metamorphosis of Saipan. I have stepped out in faith to bring my thoughts out loud. Faith brings hope and hope brings the greatest of them all! I have set my mind to go back in 2010, if not sooner. I'm not going to let the circumstances hinder me from being the change I want to see. I charge you all to be the change you want to see in the CNMI and beyond!

Jeaniffer H. Cubangbang
Honolulu, HI

Congratulations!

I would like to congratulate my students for passing my subject. A total of 41 students successfully finished the Basic Electronics Course 1 held in Kagman High School. During the whole semester they learned how to use a UPS (uninterrupted power source) as their final project for the first semester. Together with my students and the support of other companies, the project was a success. My students are now capable of creating their own UPS that will last for about 4 to 5 hours, depending on the load. It can give power to a light bulb, electric fan, and television.

My students—Dion Diaz, Ken Palec, Derick Dela Cruz, and Nizelynn Masayos—would like to share with the public how they did it:

"The materials you need in order to have your own extended UPS are a UPS for backup power for a computer, a car battery, and wire connectors.

"A normal UPS will work for 15 to 25 minutes on one computer that has 3A. Replacing the UPS battery with a car battery that has 60A will last you 10 hours. This means you can also plug in a light and a fan. Let's say the light has 1A and the fan has 2A. This means you will have 5 hours of power if you plug in a fan, a light and a computer. This basic electronic idea can help you have power when there's a power outage."

My class and I would like to thank Mr. Rey Camacho for his help and most especially Mr. Ada, our school principal, for his support.

Again, I would like to congratulate my students for passing the subject, Basic Electronics. May you continue to upgrade the knowledge I imparted to you. This is the first step toward your dreams. May you study hard on other subjects so that you would have a better future.

Benjie F. Ladringan
Basic Electronic Class Instructor
Kagman High School

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Students of the Basic Electronics Course 1 held in Kagman High School pose for a photograph.

Shame on you!

To the new ad-hoc group: Shame on of you for disrespecting our indigenous inherent local right to own land here in our homeland. The members of your group are the same individuals who fought off increased minimum wages hikes and kept the locals unemployed and on food stamp lines to appease your own investment benefits.

For over 25 years, Article 12 had remained in its sacred place, our Covenant, and protected by our Constitution for our people and the future generations of our homeland. Your group treats our islands as if it were the size of Los Angeles or Hawaii but none of you even realize that we are nothing but a speck on the globe. While our own children are waiting on a long list for homesteads, you are now opting to tear down our gates and sell our lands to the outside world.

We hope the indigenous Chamorros and Carolinians are reading this with serious and grave concerns, so that they may be aware of what some greedy "local Northern Mariana-descent" are proposing. Shame on all of you, especially former Washington Representative and Covenant negotiator Edward Pangelinan, who wasted taxpayers dollars for many years behind closed doors in Washington doing nothing to protect our homeland and our people, and then coming home and saying that Article 12 is the problem. Get real, Mr. Pangelinan.

We ask all of you ad-hoc wannabe mainlander group one question: Where are some of the Native Hawaiians presently living in their homeland? On their own land or somewhere on the shoreline? It's because of self-interest greedy individuals such as yourselves that put the natives out of their own homes and into cardboard boxes on sidewalks and onto the jungles near the shorelines while you sit on your Donald Trump throne reaping the benefits and profits received from taking advantage of the disadvantaged. *Taya respeto para y taotao tano, yan taimamalao hamyo na taotao tano.*

All of you are so used to the easy life. It's about time you learn how to survive the common ordinary way of life in our homeland, so get used to it. If not, pack your bags and move on out of here and leave Article 12 alone for you are the impediments in our homeland.

Gregorio Cruz Jr.
Taotao Tano CNMI Inc.

Erratum

MATHCOUNTS has to report an error that occurred at the Chapter Competition on Feb. 7 at the Multi-Purpose Center.

A student from Grace Christian Academy, Yong Jeong Kim, placed 9th in the individual competition. MATHCOUNTS regrets the error and will award Yong Jeong Kim a 9th place trophy at the State Competition, which is scheduled for March 7, 2009 at the Multi-Purpose Center in Susupe.

We appreciate the Saipan Tribune reporting the above error so that both the student and the school can be acknowledged.

Thank you.

Martha Camacho
Chapter Coordinator

THE FIRST

From Page 10

Fortunately for the nation, while Mr. Obama has an experience deficit, he possesses a surfeit of smarts and steadiness. Perhaps partly as a result, the country's optimism about him is accompanied by a realistic assessment of the problems he confronts and the time it will take to address them. Even in an age of instant gratification, Americans seem to understand that economic recovery is likely to take months, if not years. Whether this attitude will continue in the face of continued economic stress is open to question. But the sober approach Mr. Obama has taken since his election, underscoring the severity of the situation and taking pains to avoid over-promising results, may help keep the patient calm in the months that it will take to gauge the medication's effectiveness.

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Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam Homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

The Weather

5-Day Forecast for Saipan and Tinian

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Partly cloudy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 15 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 15 to 20 mph.	Mostly sunny and breezy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°	▲87° ▼77°

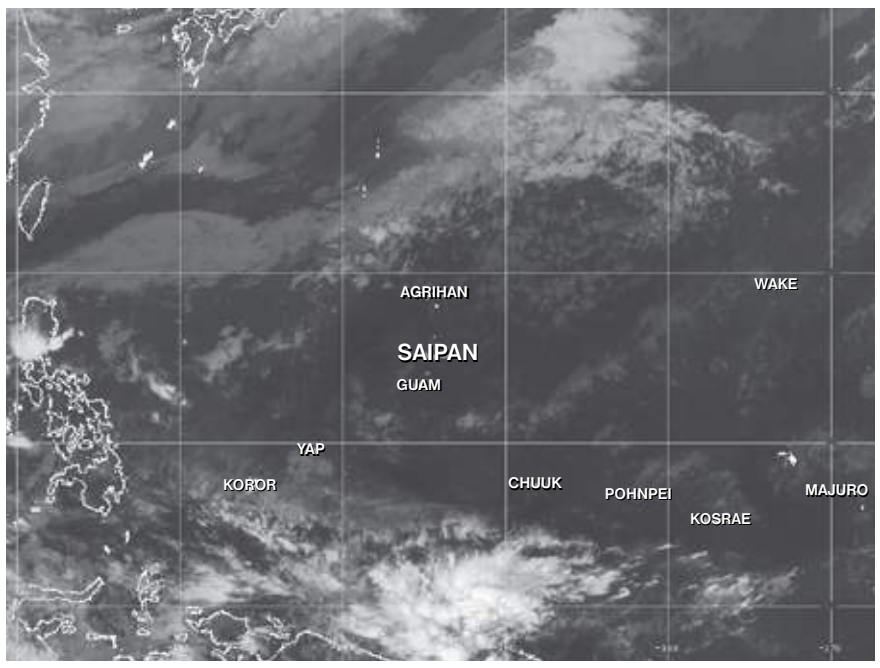
Micronesia

Guam and Rota	Cloudy	▲85	▼76
Palau	Showers	▲87	▼77
Yap	Showers	▲88	▼77
Chuuk	Showers	▲88	▼78
Pohnpei	Partly Sunny	▲87	▼76
Kosrae	Showers	▲88	▼77
Majuro	Showers	▲85	▼76

Around The Globe

Auckland	Showers	▲74	▼63
Beijing	Partly Sunny	▲34	▼21
Hong Kong	Partly Sunny	▲75	▼68
Honolulu	Showers	▲75	▼69
London	Cloudy	▲55	▼44
Los Angeles	Showers	▲59	▼46
Manila	Showers	▲86	▼75
Melbourne	Mostly Sunny	▲79	▼61
Miami	Mostly Sunny	▲75	▼60
New York	Mostly Sunny	▲40	▼31
Osaka	Rain/Snow	▲41	▼33
Paris	Showers	▲45	▼40
Pusan	Cloudy	▲44	▼26
Rome	Showers	▲49	▼32
Salem	Mostly Cloudy	▲47	▼33
San Francisco	Showers	▲57	▼47
Seoul	Mostly Sunny	▲34	▼21
Tokyo	Partly Sunny	▲52	▼39
Washington, DC	Mostly Sunny	▲46	▼32

Yesterday's Satellite Image



PICTURE TIME: 1:00AM, MONDAY, FEB. 16, 2009
Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A surface trough extends westward from 22N144E through a weak circulation centered near 22N138E then southwestward to beyond 130E at 19N. Convergence near the trough axis and circulation is generating scattered showers and extensive mid-level cloud-cover northwest of a line extending northeastward from 19N140E to 25N150E. A near-equatorial trough reaches southeastward from 5N130E to end at EQ135E. Convergent winds north and east of the trough axis are triggering scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms south of Yap and Chuuk or south of a line extending eastward from 3N130E to 3N156E.

Tides

Saipan Harbor		
2:34 AM Today	High Tide:	1.4 Feet
6:50 AM Today	Low Tide:	1.2 Feet
12:16 PM Today	High Tide:	1.7 Feet
8:24 PM Today	Low Tide:	0.2 Feet

Sunrise/Sunset

Today	6:41 AM	6:21 PM
Wednesday	6:40 AM	6:22 PM
Thursday	6:40 AM	6:22 PM
Friday	6:39 AM	6:22 PM
Saturday	6:39 AM	6:23 PM

Moonrise/Moonset

Today	12:22 AM	11:47 AM
Wednesday	1:15 AM	12:35 PM
Thursday	2:07 AM	1:26 PM
Friday	2:57 AM	2:18 PM
Saturday	3:45 AM	3:10 PM

GET YOUR PICTURES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS PUBLISHED—FOR FREE

The *Saipan Tribune* accepts for FREE publication the following:

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- ISLAND SNAPSHOTS
  Birthdays, baptisms, christenings, family gatherings, reunions, club activities, and other community-related events.
- BIRTHDAY GREETINGS
  A way for families and friends to greet their loved ones, accompanied by a picture of the person celebrating his/her birthday.
- BUSINESS
  Corporate donations, volunteer work, promotions, granting of awards, team-building exercises, meetings and other activities by members of the business community.
- SAMU'T SARI
  Pictures from the islands' Filipino community, primarily focusing on Filipino activities, gatherings, get-togethers, volunteer work, etc.
- TRAVELOGUE
  Pictures of off-island travels. Contributors may submit up to 10 pictures for consideration.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- COMMUNITY BRIEFS
  Announcements of upcoming activities of organizations, community clubs, government agencies, and private companies.
- CAMPUS BULLETIN
  Announcements of upcoming activities in public and private schools, as well as calendar of activities. May include PTSA meetings, enrollment procedures.

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- Photos should be original and not copyrighted. Contributors must have the right to allow the *Saipan Tribune* to publish the pictures.
- Digital pictures should be high-resolution (minimum of 800kb).
- Must have complete details (who, what, where, when), the name of contact person, and phone number.
- Photos must have been taken in the last two months.
- For birthday greetings, must be submitted no later than 12 noon of the previous day to make it to next day's edition.

For announcements:

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- Must be submitted no later than 12 noon to make it to next day's edition.

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- Drop off: 2nd Floor, CIC Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan
  To check if contributions are received, call (670) 235-6397, 235-2440, 235-8747

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- The *Saipan Tribune* will decide how often community announcements are going to be published.
- For Travelogue, the *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to choose which pictures to publish.

NMI CRIME STOPPERS

Anonymous tips can now be submitted through the following:

- Call 234-7272 (PARA) on any telephone
- *11 on any PTI cellular phone
- Log on to the internet at www.nmicrimestoppers.com

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ADVERTISING For inquiries contact (670) 235-2769. E-mail: sales@saipantribune.com

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2009

DEPARTURES

Saipan-Rota			
CO9597	11:50am	12:25pm	1,7
Saipan-Guam			
CO9317	5:00am	5:50am	Daily
CO9313	8:30am	9:20am	Daily
CO9597	11:50am	1:20pm	1,7 via Rota
CO9601	12:30pm	1:20pm	2,3,4,5,6
CO9603	3:30pm	4:20pm	Daily
CO9605	6:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
CO9599	9:30pm	10:20pm	Daily
Saipan-Narita			
NW 099	5:00am	7:35am	Daily
NW 078	8:20am	1:30pm	2,3,4,5,6,7
NW 075	4:55pm	7:30pm	Daily
Guam-Narita			
NW 73	4:10pm	7:00pm	Daily
NW 81	3:55pm	6:55pm	Daily
Saipan-Osaka			
OZ 119	4:00am	6:40am	1,4,6
NW 083	4:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
Guam-Osaka			
NW 79	4:45pm	7:35pm	Daily
Saipan-Nagoya			
NW 078	8:20am	11:05am	Daily
Guam-Nagoya			
NW 23	4:30pm	7:20pm	Daily
Saipan-Incheon			
OZ 604	2:10am	6:00am	1
OZ 604	2:40am	6:30am	2,3,4,5,6,7
OZ 119	4:00am	11:25am	1,4,6 via Osaka
OZ 606	3:20pm	7:00pm	Daily
Saipan-Busan			
OZ 608	3:20am	6:50am	1,4,5,7
Saipan-Shanghai			
FM 844	2:50am	5:40am	2,6
Rota-Guam			
CO 9597	12:50pm	1:20pm	1,7
Guam-Palau			
CO 953	7:40pm	8:40pm	1,7
CO 893	5:50pm	6:50pm	3,5
Palau-Manila			
CO 893	7:35pm	9:10pm	3,5
Guam-Manila			
CO 893	5:50pm	9:10pm	3,5 via Koror
CO 933	8:00pm	9:40pm	Daily
PR 111	6:00am	7:50am	1,2,4,6,7
Nagoya-Manila			
NW 71	8:40pm	11:55pm	Daily
Incheon-Hongkong			
OZ 721	9:20am	12:00pm	Daily
OZ 723	7:45pm	10:35pm	Daily
OZ 7173	8:00pm	10:50pm	5,7
Narita-Manila			
NW 1	7:00pm	10:55pm	Daily

ARRIVALS

Rota-Saipan			
CO 9598	3:25am	4:00am	5,6
Guam-Saipan			
CO 9316	2:30am	3:20am	1,2,3,4,7
CO9598	2:30am	4:00am	5,6 via Rota
CO9596	7:00am	7:50am	Daily
CO9600	10:20am	11:10am	Daily
CO9602	2:00pm	2:50pm	Daily
CO9604	5:00pm	5:50pm	Daily
CO9606	8:00pm	8:50pm	Daily
Narita-Saipan			
NW 076	10:15am	2:40pm	Daily
NW 077	6:25pm	1:20am+1	2,3,4,5,6,7
NW 100	8:45pm	1:10am+1	Daily
Narita-Guam			
NW 74	9:45am	2:20pm	Daily
NW 82	10:30am	3:10pm	Daily
Osaka-Saipan			
OZ 120	9:50pm	2:20am+1	3,5,7
NW 084	10:40am	3:05pm	Daily
Osaka-Guam			
NW 80	10:30am	3:00pm	Daily
Nagoya-Saipan			
NW 077	9:00pm	1:20am+1	Daily
Nagoya-Guam			
NW 24	10:00am	2:30pm	Daily
Incheon-Saipan			
OZ 605	9:00am	2:20pm	Daily
OZ 603	7:40pm	1:00am+1	7
OZ 120	7:10pm	2:20am+1	3,5,7 via Osaka
OZ 603	8:10pm	1:30am+1	1,2,3,4,5,6
Busan-Saipan			
OZ 607	9:00pm	2:10am+1	3,4,6,7
Shanghai-Saipan			
FM 843	7:15pm	1:50am+1	1,5
Guam-Rota			
CO 9598	2:30am	3:00am	5,6
Palau-Guam			
CO 954	2:30am	5:25am	1,2
CO 892	2:35am	5:30am	4,6
Manila-Palau			
CO 892	10:10pm	1:50am+1	3,5
Manila-Guam			
CO 892	10:10pm	5:30am+1	3,5 via Koror
CO 934	11:10pm	4:40am+1	Daily
PR 110	10:10pm	4:00am+1	1,3,5,6,7
Manila-Nagoya			
NW 72	6:30am	11:05am	Daily
Hongkong-Incheon			
OZ 724	12:30am	4:50am	Daily
OZ 7183	12:45am	5:05am	1,4,6
OZ 722	1:30pm	5:45pm	Daily
Manila-Narita			
NW 2	7:45am	12:40pm	Daily

Editor's Note: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); CO: Continental; FM: Shanghai Airlines; PR: Philippine Airlines; NW: Northwest; OZ: Asiana
ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

FREEDOM AIR FLIGHT SCHEDULE

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
Guam-Rota			
FRE 100	7:00am	7:30am	Daily
Rota-Saipan			
FRE 100	7:50am	8:20am	Daily
Saipan-Rota			
FRE 200	9:00am	9:30am	Daily
Rota-Guam			
FRE 200	9:50am	10:15am	Daily
Guam-Rota			
FRE 300	4:00pm	4:30pm	Daily
Rota-Saipan			
FRE 300	4:50pm	5:25pm	Daily
Saipan-Rota			
FRE 400	6:00pm	6:30pm	Daily
Rota-Guam			
FRE 400	6:45pm	7:15pm	Daily
Saipan-Tinian			
FRE 101	6:45am	6:55am	Daily
FRE 103	7:30am	7:40am	Daily
FRE 105	8:00am	8:10am	Daily
FRE 107	8:40am	8:50am	Daily
FRE 109*	9:10am	9:20am	Daily
FRE 111*	10:45am	10:55am	Daily

Airline	ETD	ETA	Frequency
FRE 113	11:40am	11:50am	Daily
FRE 115	1:00pm	1:10pm	Daily
FRE 117	2:30pm	2:40pm	Daily
FRE 119	4:00pm	4:10pm	Daily
FRE 121	4:40pm	4:50pm	Daily
FRE 123 *	5:40pm	5:50pm	Daily
FRE 125 *	6:00pm	6:10pm	Daily
Tinian-Saipan w/ connecting flights to Rota or Guam**			
FRE 102	7:05am	7:15am	Daily
FRE 104	7:50am	8:00am	Daily
FRE 106**	8:20am	8:30am	Daily
FRE 108**	9:00am	9:10am	Daily
FRE 110	10:00am	10:10am	Daily
FRE 112	11:05am	11:15am	Daily
FRE 114	12:00pm	12:10pm	Daily
FRE 116	1:30pm	1:40pm	Daily
FRE 118	2:50pm	3:00pm	Daily
FRE 120**	4:20pm	4:30pm	Daily
FRE 122**	5:00pm	5:10pm	Daily
FRE 124	6:05pm	6:15pm	Daily
FRE 126	6:20pm	6:30pm	Daily

Business

Oil steady amid OPEC talks of more output cuts

SINGAPORE (AP)—Oil prices stayed above $37 a barrel Monday in Asia as OPEC members talked up more production cuts over the weekend amid weakening global demand for crude.

Light, sweet crude for March delivery fell 6 cents to $37.45 a barrel by midday in Singapore on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract rose $3.53 on Friday to settle at $37.51.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries has implemented most of the 4.2 million barrels a day of output reductions announced since September, but the cuts have been overwhelmed by a collapse in crude demand amid the global slowdown.

On Sunday, Mohammed Saleh al-Sada, Qatar's minister of state for energy and industry affairs, said OPEC is ready to cut output further when it meets next month. Al-Sada said a reasonable price for oil would be $70 a barrel.

Venezuelan Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez said Saturday his country would support new production cuts in the face of rising crude inventories.

"It's probably 50-50 that they'll cut again in March," said Clarence Chu, a trader at market maker Hudson Capital Energy in Singapore. "The budgets of a lot of those countries run on oil so they need the price higher."

Even within OPEC, however, there is skepticism over whether reducing supply will spur higher prices.

Moussa Marafi, a high-ranking Kuwaiti oil official, told Annahar newspaper in comments published Sunday that crude prices are unlikely to rise above $40 per barrel, even if OPEC decides to cut as much as 2 million barrels per day next month.

Oil prices are being pressured by surging U.S. crude inventories and a lack of compliance to quotas by some OPEC members, he said.

"Until demand picks up, oil won't have a significant rally," Chu said. "Another big OPEC cut could add $5 to the price, but it's not going to send it to $70."

U.S. markets are closed Monday for Presidents Day.

Investors have already priced in the passage of a $787 billion stimulus package that President Barack Obama plans to sign on Tuesday and will be looking for its impact on consumer and industrial demand in the coming months.

Obama is scheduled to outline his mortgage-rescue proposal on Wednesday.

In other Nymex trading, gasoline futures were steady at $1.21 a gallon. Heating oil gained 0.25 cent to $1.30 a gallon, while natural gas for March delivery droppped 17.2 cents to $4.28 per 1,000 cubic feet.

In London, the March Brent contract fell 11 cents to $44.70 on the ICE Futures exchange.

Crude oil is getting cheaper—so why isn't gas?

NEW YORK (AP)—Crude oil prices have fallen to new lows for this year. So you'd think gas prices would sink right along with them.

Not so.

On Thursday, for example, crude oil closed just under $34 a barrel, its lowest point for 2009. But the national average price of a gallon of gas rose to $1.95 on the same day, its peak for the year. On Friday gas went a penny higher.

To drivers once again grimacing as they tank up, it sounds like a conspiracy. But it has more to do with an energy market turned upside-down that has left gas cut off from its usual economic moorings.

The price of gas is indeed tied to oil. It's just a matter of which oil.

The benchmark for crude oil prices is West Texas Intermediate, drilled exactly where you would imagine. That's the price, set at the New York Mercantile Exchange, that you see quoted on business channels and in the morning paper.

Right now, in an unusual market trend, West Texas crude is selling for much less than inferior grades of crude from other places around the world. A severe economic downturn has left U.S. storage facilities brimming with it, sending prices for the premium crude to five-year lows.

But it is the overseas crude that goes into most of the gas made in the United States. So prices at the pump will probably keep going up no matter what happens to the benchmark price of crude oil.

"We're going definitely over $2, and I bet we'll hit $2.50 before spring," said Tom Kloza, publisher and chief oil analyst at Oil Price Information Service. "This is going to be an unusual year."

On the last day of 2008, gas went for $1.62 on average, according to the auto club AAA, the Oil Price Information Service and Wright Express, a company that tracks transportation data.

The recession in America has dramatically cut demand for crude oil, and inventories are piling up. So prices for West Texas crude have fallen well below what oil costs from places like the North Sea, Saudi Arabia and South America.

That foreign oil sells in some cases for $10 more per barrel—and that doesn't even include shipping.

States look to booze for stimulus shots to economy

SALT LAKE CITY (AP)—Utah is the only state that requires people to fill out an application and pay a fee before entering a bar.

But the shelf life of this law—enacted 40 years ago in a state where nearly two out of three residents are members of a religion that shuns drinking—appears to be dwindling.

In Utah, and across the country, governors and lawmakers faced with budget deficits are advocating loosening laws that restrict alcohol consumption in the hopes of boosting tax revenues.

■ In Georgia, Connecticut, Indiana, Texas, Alabama and Minnesota, lawmakers are considering legislation this year that would end the ban on Sunday liquor sales. All but 15 states sell booze on Sundays.

■ In Nebraska, a state lawmaker has proposed allowing beer to be consumed in state parks as a way to boost tourism.

■ Other states, including Utah, are considering allowing the sale of liquor on Election Day.

Drinkers shouldn't break out the bubbly just yet: Two dozen states, including California, Massachusetts, Oklahoma and Virginia, are looking to help their budgets by raising alcohol taxes.

Alcohol taxes are a popular budgetary crutch for lawmakers because liquor sales tend to hold up relatively well, compared with other revenue streams, during hard times, said Steve Schmidt, vice president of the Alexandria, Va. based National Alcohol Beverage Control Association.

In 2008, revenue reported by liquor suppliers rose 2.8 percent from the previous year to $18.7 billion, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States. That's slower than the 6 percent average annual growth rate since 2000.

AP

R. Woodland, of Murray, Utah, sips on his beer at a Chili's restaurant Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009, in Midvale, Utah.

Nation's peanut growers reeling from outbreak

LUBBOCK, Texas (AP)—With hundreds of thousands of Americans out of work and the economy in a nosedive, the U.S. peanut industry expected sales to soar this year.

Americans tend to turn to peanut products to stretch their food dollars in tough times, avoiding more expensive protein sources such as steak and ground beef.

Enter an ongoing salmonella outbreak that has sickened some 600 people in 43 states and been linked to nine deaths, and those rosy predictions after a record growing season have been dashed.

"They've tainted our entire industry," said Shelly Nutt, executive director of the peanut producers board in Texas, the nation's second largest growing state behind Georgia. "Public perception is killing us."

More than 2,000 products have been recalled—one of the largest in U.S. history. And the damage was done by a small player in the industry—Virginia-based Peanut Corp. of America. Two of the company's plants—in Blakely, Ga., and in Plainview, Texas—have been shuttered after salmonella contamination was found.

The company, which has filed for bankruptcy, handles no more than 2.5 percent of all peanuts processed, yet sales of jarred peanut butter plummeted 22 percent nationwide for the four weeks ending Jan. 24 compared with the same period last year, Nutt said. February's numbers will likely worsen significantly, she said.

TOY FAIR AP

Dora and her friend Boots the monkey are Ty Beanie Babies featured in the movie Madagascar 2, a featured display by the Ty company at the New York Toy Fair at the Javits Center in New York Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Wall Street might search for motivation this week

NEW YORK (AP)—The stock market doesn't have much to hang its hat on. With the stream of corporate earnings reports waning and President Barack Obama preparing to sign the $787 billion stimulus package, investors this week will be looking for fresh clues about the economy. Wall Street has been busy focusing on companies' quarterly numbers and the developments in Washington. Now, investors are faced with finding less obvious answers to the question "What's next?" Any jitters about what might be the next major bit of news to drive the market could extend the back-and-forth trading seen in the nearly three months since the Standard & Poor's 500 index finished at an 11-year low on Nov. 20. Stocks fell sharply last week to end at their lowest levels since November, as investors factored in the stimulus bill and looked to other uncertainties about the economy. The benchmark S&P 500 ended down 4.8 percent for the week, while the Dow Jones industrial average lost 5.2 percent.

Sin City worries its image hurts business travel

LAS VEGAS (AP)—Sin City is worried that its well-honed style is crimping its business. Born of carefully crafted slogans—"What happens here stays here"—and smiling, sequined showgirls, the image of a 24-hour adult Disneyland with free-flowing booze and casino chips is making the tourist destination seem radioactive to companies keen on not appearing frivolous as they seek government bailouts. In the past two weeks, at least four major companies canceled meetings worth hundreds of thousands of dollars—not because of costs but because of appearances. Even President Barack Obama questioned the propriety of flying off to Las Vegas if taxpayers were helping foot the bill. Tourism officials, already nervous after watching meeting and convention attendance decline 5 percent in 2008, are challenging the impression that business meetings are wasteful—especially those conducted under the neon lights of Las Vegas.

Nation

ACROSS THE NATION

Seton Hill University student shot after standoff

GREENSBURG, Pa. (AP)—Police say a Seton Hill University student has been killed by police after a standoff at a residence in western Pennsylvania. Police in Greensburg say they received a call early Sunday indicating 22-year-old Joseph Frederick Briggs had threatened to harm himself and his roommates. Police say three men and a woman fled the home after Briggs threatened them with a gun. He then fired toward the officers, hitting parked cars and a house. Several residences were evacuated and campus buildings were locked down. Police say Briggs was heavily intoxicated and stayed inside the barricaded home for about three hours. Authorities say he was later fatally shot by police. Seton Hill is a 2,000-student Catholic liberal arts university, about 35 miles from Pittsburgh.

Nev. plans more lion hunts in effort to save deer

RENO, Nev. (AP)—State wildlife officials have announced a plan to kill more mountain lions to help increase the deer population, a move criticized by animal advocates who say drought and development are more important factors in the decrease of deer numbers. The Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners told agency staff last week to employ the help of sport hunters and contract employees from the U.S. Agriculture Department's Wildlife Services for the state wildlife department's new "program of intensive, sustained predator reduction." Ken Mayer, director of the Nevada Department of Wildlife, said his agency would use science to figure out the number of lions to be killed in areas where the predators have been found to adversely affect deer numbers. "It's not an effort to exterminate mountain lions," Mayer said. "It's an effort to better manage lions with the prey base. Some hunters think the solution to the deer problem is to kill a lot of lions and the deer will come back."

RI nightclub fire victims mourned in service

WEST WARWICK, R.I. (AP)—The survivors of a nightclub fire and relatives of the those who died in the 2003 blaze gathered Sunday to recite the names of the dead and honor them with 100 seconds of silence, one second for each victim. Ken Fletcher, whose stepdaughter Tracy Romanoff died in the fire nearly six years ago, said the tragedy was "something you're never going to forget." Some mourners noted that the number of people coming to pay their respects has shrunk as years go by. Lawsuits resulting from the fire also have delayed work on a memorial at the lot where the club once stood. "They don't show up for any of these ceremonies," said Jane Sylvester, whose son Jason died in the fire. The Station nightclub in West Warwick caught on fire Feb. 20, 2003, when pyrotechnics used by the rock band Great White ignited packaging foam used as soundproofing on the building's walls and ceiling. More than 200 people were injured.

Obama plans to head west to sign stimulus bill

President Barack Obama arrives at the home of a friend in Chicago, Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009. AP

WASHINGTON (AP)—Keeping the economy front and center, President Barack Obama heads west this week to sign the $787 billion stimulus bill and tackle the home mortgage foreclosure crisis. The direct appeals for public support follow scant GOP backing in Congress for his agenda and increasing partisan bickering.

Passage of the stimulus measure—unprecedented in its cost—was a major triumph for Obama as he struggles lift the country from a financial nosedive unseen since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Top aides said Sunday the skyrocketing unemployment rate would fall once the money begins to flow. But they also said the economy will continue its downward spiral in the short term.

"I think it's safe to say that things have not yet bottomed out," press secretary Robert Gibbs said. "They are probably going to get worse before they improve. But this is a big step forward toward making that improvement and putting people back to work."

The stimulus package, which passed with no GOP support in the House and three Republican votes in the Senate, aims to save or create as many as 3.5 million jobs through massive government investment while boosting consumer spending through modest tax cuts.

The president's determination to sign the stimulus bill into law in Denver on Tuesday suggests Obama will continue taking his economic message to the American people, who are giving him high marks for handling the crisis. The symbolism is obvious for Colorado, where a growing green-energy industry will draw major benefits from the stimulus.

"He is determined to keep in touch with the American people who sent him here to do this job," senior adviser David Axelrod said.

Gibbs said the president had taken "unprecedented" steps in a bipartisan effort to include Republicans in the legislative process. But Sen. John McCain was highly critical, declaring the stimulus would create what he called "generational theft"—huge federal deficits for years to come.

McCain, who lost the presidential race to Obama, said the Democrat had backtracked on promises of bipartisanship and was off to a bad start. "Let's start over now and sit down together," McCain said.

Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-S.C., put it more bluntly: "If this is going to be bipartisanship, the country's screwed."

With the stimulus victory in hand, Obama planned to shift to the housing crisis with an announcement Wednesday in Phoenix about reversing that sector's collapse.

Amid nurse shortage, hospitals focus on retention

MIAMI (AP)—Newly minted nurse Katie O'Bryan was determined to stay at her first job at least a year, even if she did leave the hospital every day wanting to quit.

She lasted nine months. The stress of trying to keep her patients from getting much worse as they waited, sometimes for 12 hours, in an overwhelmed Dallas emergency room was just too much. The breaking point came after paramedics brought in a child who'd had seizures. She was told he was stable and to check him in a few minutes, but O'Bryan decided not to wait. She found he had stopped breathing and was turning blue.

"If I hadn't gone right away, he probably would have died," O'Bryan said. "I couldn't do it anymore."

Many novice nurses like O'Bryan are thrown into hospitals with little direct supervision, quickly forced to juggle multiple patients and make critical decisions for the first time in their careers. About 1 in 5 newly licensed nurses quits within a year, according to one national study.

That turnover rate is a major contributor to the nation's growing shortage of nurses. But there are expanding efforts to give new nursing grads better support. Many hospitals are trying to create safety nets with residency training programs.

"It really was, 'Throw them out there and let them learn,'" said University of Portland nursing professor Diane Vines. The university now helps run a yearlong program for new nurses.

"This time around, we're a little more humane in our treatment of first-year grads, knowing they might not stay if we don't do better," she said.

The national nursing shortage could reach 500,000 by 2025, as many nurses retire and the demand for nurses balloons with the aging of baby boomers, according to Peter Buerhaus of Vanderbilt University Medical Center. The nursing professor is author of a book about the future of the nursing work force.

Nursing schools have been unable to churn out graduates fast enough to keep up with the demand, which is why hospitals are trying harder to retain them.

Medical school grads get on-the-job training during formal residencies ranging from three to seven years. Many newly licensed nurses do not have a similar protected period as they build their skills and get used to a demanding environment.

Plane that crashed near Buffalo was on autopilot

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)—The commuter plane that crashed near Buffalo was on autopilot until just before it went down in icy weather, indicating that the pilot may have ignored federal safety recommendations and violated the airline's own policy for flying in such conditions, an investigator said Sunday.

Federal guidelines and the airline's own instructions suggest a pilot should not engage the autopilot when flying through ice. If the ice is severe, the company that operated Continental Flight 3407 requires pilots to shut off the autopilot.

"You may be able in a manual mode to sense something sooner than the autopilot can sense it," said Steve Chealander of the National Transportation Safety Board, which also recommends that pilots disengage the autopilot in icy conditions.

Automatic safety devices returned the aircraft to manual control just before it fell from the sky, Chealander said.

During a Sunday briefing, Chealander described the flight's frantic last moments, which included a steep drop and rollercoaster-like pitching and rolling.

Chealander said information from the plane's flight data recorder indicates that the plane pitched up at an angle of 31 degrees, then pitched down at 45 degrees.

The plane rolled to the left at 46 degrees, then snapped back to the right at 105 degrees - 15 degrees beyond vertical.

Radar data shows Flight 3407 fell from 1,800 feet above sea level to 1,000 feet in five seconds, he said. Passengers and crew would have experienced G-forces up to twice as strong as on the ground.

Illinois GOP leader calls on Sen. Burris to resign

CHICAGO (AP)—Just as Illinois was moving past the agony and embarrassment of former Gov. Rod Blagojevich's ousting, the fellow Democrat whom Blagojevich appointed to the U.S. Senate was hearing calls for his own resignation Sunday amid allegations he lied to legislators.

Freshman Sen. Roland Burris released an affidavit on Saturday that contradicts his statements last month to a House committee investigating Blagojevich's impeachment.

"I can't believe anything that comes out of Mr. Burris at this point," Rep. Jim Durkin, the impeachment committee's ranking Republican, said at a news conference Sunday. "I think it would be in the best interest of the state if he resigned because I don't think the state can stand this anymore."

But an adamant and sometimes emotional Burris told reporters in Chicago later Sunday that he hadn't done anything wrong and never misled anyone.

"I've always conducted myself with honor and integrity," he said. "At no time did I ever make any inconsistent statement."

Gov. Pat Quinn, who advanced to the governor's mansion after Blagojevich was ousted over corruption allegations last month, also called on Burris to explain the contradiction.

"My opinion is that he owes the people of Illinois a complete explanation," Quinn said, according to spokesman Bob Reed.

Durkin and House Republican Leader Tom Cross also want an investigation of Burris for possible perjury.

Asia

Australian wildfire suspect named

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)—A court lifted the ban Monday on identifying the only arson suspect so far in Australia's recent deadly wildfires, and authorities urged people not to target him in their rage over the disaster's more than 180 deaths.

The case of Brendan Sokaluk, a 39-year-old man accused of lighting one of hundreds of fires that swept southern Victoria state on Feb. 7, went before a court packed with media and onlookers Monday, but he chose to stay in police protective custody rather than attend.

Sokaluk was arrested Friday and charged with one count of arson causing death and one of lighting a wildfire in connection to a blaze known as the Churchill fire. He faces a maximum sentence of 25 years on the first charge, and 15 years on the second. He was also charged with possessing child pornography, which carries a 5-year maximum sentence.

Extremely hot, dry and windy conditions on Feb. 7 fanned dozens of fires into raging infernos that reduced entire towns to ashes. The confirmed death toll is 181 but is expected to exceed 200. More than 1,800 homes were destroyed and 7,500 people displaced.

A police document presented to the court alleges that Sokaluk "intentionally and without lawful excuse" set fire to a timber plantation in southeastern Victoria state on Feb. 7 and "did thereby commit arson causing the death of another person." The document did not name or give a number to the victims.

Officials have said previously that the Churchill fire killed at least 21 people, though officials cited only 11 deaths in court. They did not immediately explain the discrepancy, but one reason could be that the charges are connected to just part of the fire.

AP

Helen Spowart, center, the lawyer for the man charged with lighting one of Australia's recent deadly wildfires, walks out of the Magistrates Court in Melbourne, Australia Monday, Feb. 16, 2009.

Experts say deadly arson in wildfire cases is difficult to prove, partly because different wildfires often join one another, making it tough to link a fire set by an arsonist with the blaze that eventually kills people. The Churchill fire was one such combination of blazes.

Police suspect arson in at least two other fires, but have ruled out foul play in the rest.

In Monday's brief hearing, defense lawyer Helen Spowart argued that Sokaluk's name should stay a secret because of an unusual level of public anger and disgust over the case. Prosecutor Chris Beale agreed there were strong community feelings against the suspect.

Magistrate John Klestadt agreed to ban publication of photographs of Sokaluk or his address, but not his name.

"Those suspected of vigilantism would not be prevented from behaving in an abhorrent way simply by suppressing his name," Klestadt said.

Spowart did not enter a plea on Sokaluk's behalf. He was ordered to remain in custody until another hearing May 26.

NKorea hints at missile launch as Kim turns 67

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korea vowed Monday to press ahead with test-firing what neighboring governments believe is a long-range missile, but it sought to portray the launch as part of a space program amid growing pressure to drop the plan.

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency made the claim on the 67th birthday of leader Kim Jong Il and as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was en route to Asia for meetings where the North's missile and nuclear programs are expected to be a focus.

KCNA claimed the North has the right to "space development"—a term the country has used in the past to disguise a missile test as a satellite launch. It also accused the United States and other countries of trying to block the country's "peaceful scientific research" by linking it to a missile test.

"One will come to know later what will be launched" from North Korea, KCNA said, claiming that "hostile forces spread the rumor about" the country's "preparations for launching a long-distance missile."

When North Korea test-fired a long-range missile in 1998, it claimed to have put a satellite into orbit.

"It means they're going to fire a missile as a satellite launch," said Kim Yong-hyun, a professor at Seoul's Dongguk University. He called the North's space-program claim a "preventive" measure because a missile launch could result in punitive steps from the international community.

The KCNA report comes amid growing international pressure on Pyongyang to back out of apparent plans to carry out a test launch of a missile believed capable of reaching U.S. territory. Washington, Tokyo and Seoul have repeatedly urged the North not to fire a missile. Clinton, before departing for Asia, also urged Pyongyang not to take any provocative actions.

Asia stocks down, Japan sinks deeper into recession

HONG KONG (AP)—Most Asian stock markets fell Monday, as new figures showed Japan's economy contracted the most in 35 years and Group of Seven finance ministers warned the global slump will drag on through most of the year.

The news out of Japan, worse than many forecasts, was a sobering reminder of the toll on Asia's export-driven countries as world demand collapses amid the worst economic downturn in decades. According to the government, the world's second-biggest economy shrank at an annual pace of 12.7 percent last quarter.

Investors also seemed disappointed after finance chiefs from the Group of Seven finance ministers finished their meeting with pledges to work together to boost growth and unemployment but without any concrete measures.

Increasingly, investors are unconvinced governments around the world are acting quick enough to solve the credit crisis, plummeting consumer demand and other problems at the heart of the economic slowdown.

"The global recession is deeper than anticipated. At the same time policy makers are failing to deliver measures to address the problems," Dariusz Kowalczyk, chief investment strategist for SJS Markets in Hong Kong. "It seems that what they're doing is too little too late."

Three missiles hit house in northwest Pakistan

PESHAWAR, Pakistan AP) (AP)—Muslim militants in northwest Pakistan said Monday the government had agreed to impose Islamic law as part of a proposed peace deal in the lawless region where al-Qaida and Taliban militants increasingly hold sway.

The deal—expected to be announced later Monday—would cover the Swat valley, a one-time tourist destination where Taliban militants have been brutally enforcing a hardline version of Islamic law, burning schools and attacking government targets and security forces since the middle of last year when an earlier deal broke down.

Several past deals with militants in northwest Pakistan have failed and been criticized by the United States as merely giving insurgents time to regroup, but Pakistan says force alone cannot defeat the extremists wreaking havoc there and attacking U.S. troops in neighboring Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, three missiles destroyed a house in the Kurram tribal region of the northwest, causing some causalities, witness Iqbal Khan said. It appeared likely that the attack was the latest in a barrage against suspected militants in the border region by unmanned American aircraft since August last year, but it was not immediately possible to confirm that.

Pakistani officials were not immediately available to comment. Dawn News TV station said up to 15 people were believed killed in the strike.

Regaining the Swat Valley from militants is a major test for Pakistan's shaky civilian leadership. Unlike the semiautonomous tribal regions where al-Qaida and Taliban have long thrived, the former tourist haven is supposed to be under full government control.

A 30-member delegation from a banned militant group in Swat arrived in the provincial capital Peshawar on Monday to finalize details on the deal, said Amir Izzat Khan, a spokesman for the Tahrik Nifaz Shariat Mohammadi or the Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law.

He said government representatives had agreed to their demand of imposition of Islamic or Sharia law.

ASIAN BRIEFS

Regional Taliban commander killed in airstrike

KABUL (AP)—Forces with the U.S.-backed coalition killed a regional Taliban commander and eight others in an airstrike in western Afghanistan, the U.S. said Monday. The Sunday night attack destroyed the building housing Ghulam Dastagir and eight other militants in the village of Darya-ye-Morghab, near the Turkmenistan border, the U.S. military said in a statement. Dastagir oversaw all of western Badghis province for the Taliban. He was responsible for a surge in violence in the province in recent months, including a November attack on an Afghan army convoy that killed 13 soldiers, the statement said. "He was like the shadow governor of Badghis," said Gen. Mohammad Ayub Nizyar, the former police chief of the province. He had been imprisoned in Kabul until about three months ago, when he was released.

Filipino extremists holding Sri Lankan, police say

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines (AP)—Al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf militants kidnapped a Sri Lankan peace activist and are holding him in a jungle stronghold in the southern Philippines, police said Sunday. An Abu Sayyaf faction led by commander Furuji Indama are holding Omar Jaleel, who was abducted by nine gunmen Friday from his residence on Basilan Island to the province's mountainous heartland, provincial police Chief Salik Macapantar said. Navy Commodore Alex Pama, who heads a new regional anti-kidnapping force, said the military had received a similar intelligence report and was validating it. He said government forces were attempting to rescue Jaleel and five other hostages recently seized in Basilan, about 550 miles (880 kilometers) south of Manila. "It's definitely the Abu Sayyaf," Macapantar told reporters, citing intelligence reports.

China announces military dialogue with US

BEIJING (AP)—Suspended contacts between the U.S. and Chinese militaries will resume later this month shortly after a visit by newly appointed U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Chinese state media reported Monday. U.S. officials say China suspended most military dialogue with Washington after the Bush administration approved a $6.5 billion arms package to Taiwan last October that included guided missiles and attack helicopters. Although Beijing never formally confirmed the suspension of military exchanges, the China Daily newspaper said contacts had been put on hold after the announced arms sale and would resume with a "defense policy dialogue" involving senior officers in Beijing on Feb. 27-28. "The mainland and the U.S. will resume their military talks with a defense policy dialogue in Beijing," China Daily said. It quoted Defense Ministry spokesman Hu Changming as saying the talks would be "informal," without saying specifically what that meant or what topics the meetings would encompass.

World

US uses unmanned drones to hunt Somali pirates

ABOARD THE *USS MAHAN* (AP)—American warships off the lawless Somali coast are using unmanned drones to hunt pirates threatening one of the world's most important shipping lanes.

Sailors aboard the USS *Mahan* told The Associated Press they have been using the spy flights daily to spot potential pirate mother ships.

For years, the U.S. has used drones to track potential terrorists among Somalia's warlords, but the Navy said more and more of the planes are now being used to fight piracy.

The drones can fly more than 3,000 feet (915 meters) above sea level and relay pictures detailed enough to recognize the flags flown on fishing boats that Somalis use to avoid detection.

The drones take still photos and videos that are instantly relayed to the American ships. The Americans can then send this material to other nations in the international anti-piracy coalition that may have ships near the suspicious vessel. Countries as diverse as India, France, China and Russia have sent ships to help patrol the Gulf of Aden.

On Thursday, pictures taken by the drones, some of which also are equipped with night vision, helped apprehend nine pirates after a night flight relayed pictures of a skiff with a ladder onboard. A skiff had fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a merchant vessel in the area earlier.

The American warship dispatched helicopters to provide surveillance and air cover, and it deployed a boat with a search and seizure team.

Automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades were found and the nine men onboard were detained, although they had thrown the ladder into the sea. Still, the pictures of the ladder taken by the drone can be used as evidence, as the coalition steps up efforts to pursue the pirates through the courts as well as the waves.

Pirate mother ships often are used to tow smaller skiffs out to sea and resupply them.

Previous anti-piracy efforts have been hindered by confusion over which country has the jurisdiction to prosecute suspected pirates, but the United States and Britain both signed an agreement with Kenya to try suspects in that country, which borders Somalia.

Chavez asks Venezuelans to let him run in 2012

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)—President Hugo Chavez tried Sunday for the third time in his tumultuous decade in power to cast aside constitutional barriers to his re-election, arguing that only he can complete the transformation of Venezuela into a socialist state.

Voters on both sides said their decision was crucial to the future of Venezuela, a deeply polarized country where Chavez has channeled tremendous oil wealth into combating gaping social inequality.

"Today my political destiny is being decided," Chavez said. "The future of the country is at stake."

The recorded blare of bugles jarred Venezuelans awake before dawn, and long lines formed even before the polls opened at 6 a.m. Chavez said 40 percent of those registered had voted by noon. Authorities declared the polls closed shortly after 6 p.m., but said anyone still in line would be allowed to vote. Results were expected later Sunday.

People voting "yes" said Chavez has given poor Venezuelans cheap food, free education and quality health care, and empowered them with a discourse of class struggle after decades of U.S.-backed governments that favored the rich. No successor has emerged, and voters said they worry their gains will vanish if Chavez leaves office.

"If Chavez loses, his social achievements will all disappear," said Richard Mijares, a 40-year-old secretary.

People voting "no" said Chavez already has far too much power, with the courts, the legislature and the election council all under his influence. Removing the 12-year presidential term limit he pushed through in a 1999 referendum, they said, would make him unstoppable.

AP

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez waves to supporters from the balcony of Miraflores presidential palace after official results on Sunday's referendum were released in Caracas, Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009.

"If he wins he'll be unleashed and he'll make us like Cuba, because that's what he really wants," said Adriana Hernandez, a 19-year-old engineering student. "He'll create laws by decree, and go after private property."

Chavez took office in 1999 and won support for a new constitution the same year that allowed the president to serve two six-year terms, barring him from the 2012 elections. Sunday's vote was his second attempt to change that. Voters rejected a broader referendum in December 2007.

Venezuela's leftist allies in Latin America have followed the model. Ecuador pushed through a new constitution in September and Bolivia did so in January. Both loosened rules on presidential re-election. Nicaragua's ruling Sandinistas also plan to propose an amendment that would let Daniel Ortega run for another consecutive term.

Venezuela has seen 15 elections or referendums in Chavez's decade, which Chavez supporters say proves his dedication to democracy and which supporters call tiresome. Chavez has said that even if he loses, there's nothing to stop him from calling another referendum.

He argues he needs more time to complete Venezuela's transition to socialism—a process he has said could take another decade or more. He says his "little change" would deepen democracy by giving voters more options.

Baby-faced dad, 13, raises 'broken Britain' fears

LONDON (AP)—Ahhh, Britain. The land of Shakespeare and the Beatles, Churchill and the Queen. Rolling green hills, groovy London shops, hip plaids splashed over raincoats and umbrellas.

Cut to the reality of 2009: the highest teen pregnancy rate in western Europe, a binge drinking culture that leaves drunk teens splayed out in the streets and rising knife crime that has turned some pub fights into deadly affairs.

Ahhh, Britain.

In the latest symbol of what some are calling "broken Britain," 13-year-old Alfie and his 15-year-old girlfriend Chantelle became parents last week. The news sparked a flurry of handwringing from the media—and even ordinary folk admitted it didn't help that Alfie barely looked 10, let alone 13, as he cradled his newborn daughter.

Alfie's father, who reportedly has nine or 10 children of his own, gamely promised to have a "birds and the bees" chat with his son to prevent him from producing a second child before he grows facial hair.

Somehow that was not reassuring.

Sir Bernard Ingham, once press secretary to former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, told the Associated Press that people from across Britain's political spectrum are in despair over the country's social breakdown. "It's an indication that we've lost our way, that people don't know the difference between right and wrong," he said of young Alfie. "The plain fact is society can't proceed on this basis. I think this is an indication of broken Britain."

Ingham said Britain's binge drinking and youth violence reflect the same general fall in standards and discipline.

"I think in time there will be a swing against this permissiveness," he said, noting a shift from British debauchery in the 18th century to Victorian straight-laced standards 100 years later.

Binge drinking has produced a rise in liver disease among Britons in their 20s and the unpleasant reputation of British "lager louts" at holiday resorts across Europe.

Austria: 'Katrina' pastor giving up promotion

VIENNA (AP)—A pastor who created a controversy by suggesting that God punished New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina because of the city's sins said Sunday he will ask the pope to rescind his promotion.

Pope Benedict XVI's recent appointment of the conservative Rev. Gerhard Maria Wagner, 54, to auxiliary bishop in Linz, Austria's third largest city, sparked an outcry among Catholics who warned it could prompt people to leave the church.

Wagner, among other things, also had characterized Harry Potter novels as "Satanism."

"Regarding the fierce criticism, I am in prayer and, after consulting the diocesan bishop, I have decided to ask the Holy Father in Rome to take back my promotion as auxiliary bishop," Wagner said in a statement released by Linz Diocesan Bishop Ludwig Schwarz.

Schwarz declined to comment to The Associated Press about Wagner's decision, but said more information would result from an extraordinary meeting of Austria's bishops in Vienna on Monday. The meeting was announced on Friday to discuss widespread objections to the Vatican's appointment of Wagner.

WORLD BRIEFS

No shipments to Gaza until Israeli soldier freed

JERUSALEM (AP)—Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said border crossings with Gaza will not be fully opened until a captured Israeli soldier held since 2007 is freed. Egypt is trying to mediate a long-term truce between Israel and Hamas militants after Israel's recent offensive in Gaza to stop Palestinian rocket fire. Egyptian officials and Hamas negotiators have said an agreement appears near. However, a rocket was fired from Gaza late Sunday, exploding in southern Israel, the military said. No one was hurt. Israel's policy is to retaliate for every rocket attack. In the truce talks, Hamas insists that border crossings must be opened as part of the deal. Israel and Egypt have imposed a blockade on Gaza since Hamas took over the territory in 2007 and have allowed in only humanitarian supplies. Olmert said the soldier, Sgt. Gilad Schalit, is Israel's first priority. The prime minister spoke Sunday to U.S. Jewish leaders, saying, "Hamas must think twice if they think we will open borders before Gilad Schalit is returned home and healthy." Olmert said Israel would pay a stiff price, freeing militants from Israeli prisons.

He said Israel would not create a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, continuing to allow in vital supplies.

Gaza man killed in recycling accident

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP)—Palestinian hospital officials say a 25-year-old Gaza man has been killed and five people have been wounded in a blast along the border with Israel. Palestinian security officials say the explosion in the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya was caused when people who were melting down scrap metal for recycling inadvertently threw an explosive device into the fire. Residents initially reported Monday that a shell exploded. Meanwhile, Israel's military says two rockets fired from Gaza in violation of an informal truce landed in Israel. No injuries were reported. Israel ended a three-week military offensive in Gaza on Jan. 18, and the territory's Islamic Hamas rulers declared a cease-fire the same day. But sporadic violence has continued as Egypt tries to mediate a long-term truce.

Overdrive

HONDA FCX CLARITY

Enjoying clarity for beauty's sake

BY DAN NEIL
LOS ANGELES TIMES

LOS ANGELES TIMES

The Honda FCX Clarity fuel-cell vehicle is Honda's first fuel-cell vehicle built to mass market standards.

I've driven lots of cars. I've wallowed like a Russian oligarch pig in the gorgeous mud of a $1.6 million Bugatti Veyron. I've spit tailpipe fire across the midnight Mojave at the wheel of a Lamborghini. I've brushed gape-mouthed peasants aside with the chrome cowcatcher grille of a Rolls Royce Phantom.

Yet I have never driven a car half as advanced, as futuristic, as blind-with-science as the Honda FCX Clarity hydrogen fuel-cell vehicle.

Nor one so expensive. More on that in a moment.

But first, let's get this out of the way: Hydrogen fuel-cell technology won't work in cars. It's a tragic cul-de-sac in the search for sustainable mobility and is a lousy way to move cars.

Face it: Fuel-cell technology has been eclipsed by vastly cheaper, here-now advances in batteries and plug-in electric vehicles. To knit together even the barest network of H2 refueling stations would cost billions. And, in any case, the fuel itself—whether produced by cracking natural gas or hydrolyzing water—represents a horrible energy return on investment.

Some illustrative math: It takes about 60 kilowatt-hours of electricity to gin a kilogram of hydrogen from water. The FCX Clarity's tank holds about 4 kilograms of H2, and that gives it a range of about 270 miles on 240 kWhs.

The all-electric Tesla Roadster has a 53-kWh lithium-ion battery and a range of 220 miles. So the Tesla's per-mile costs in electricity are roughly one-quarter what they are in the FCX Clarity.

If any other company but Honda trotted this thing out, I would barf with skepticism. But Honda is dead earnest about hydrogen, and it is only its relentless, year-after-year improvement in this technology, and the extraordinary treasure Honda throws at it, that makes me think that the company knows something I don't—well, that and the army of PhDs at its command.

Yet as I see it, there are only two reasons to build the car. First, major manufacturers must begin complying with California's mandate that each sell 7,500 zero-emission vehicles between 2012 and 2014. Fuel-cell vehicles get extra points in meeting this quota.

Of the 200 FCX Claritys Honda intends to build, it will lease almost all of them in Southern California. The carmaker won't say what the program cost for the vehicle is, but I estimate about $400 million, which pencils out to $2 million per vehicle. That makes my four-door test car the most valuable automobile I've ever driven by a margin of about one whole Ferrari 430.

The second reason Honda might have had for building the FCX Clarity: Nothing invested in this project goes to waste. The car's state-of-the-art fuel cell can be amortized in Honda's portable power generation division (the company makes awesome generators). And since a fuel-cell vehicle is essentially an electric vehicle with a hydrogen heart, all the technology—the glossy aerodynamics; the powerful, quiet and compact 100 kW (134 hp) electric motor; the new space-saving coaxial gearbox—can be rolled into future electric and plug-in electric projects.

Perhaps obscured by questions of practicality and cost is the fact—and it is a fact—that the FCX Clarity is the most beautiful car ever to wear the big H on the nose. It's just gorgeous, a big garnet-red teardrop falling from the cheek of the future, a sweet stanza of robot-written poetry.

The reason the FCX Clarity could take such a compelling shape is that it didn't have to be molded around the big, immovable lumps of a conventional sedan. There's no gas engine up front, so the cabin could extend dramatically forward like a mid-engine car. The large and steeply raked windshield falls away from the driver, and the roof-supporting A-pillars are exceptionally thin. The result is a wonderful cab-forward view, a panorama you won't see anywhere else but on the back of a motorcycle.

Likewise, with the small fuel cell stack (about the size of a desktop PC) situated between the front seats, and the lithium-ion battery and hydrogen tank stuffed over the rear axle, the car's cabin has room to stretch out. The FCX Clarity is huge on the inside, like Lincoln-Town-Car huge, and the trunk is a spacious 11 cubic feet. The whole is encapsulated in singlet of wind-swept modernism.

To underscore the car's eco-friendly mission, Honda uses petroleum-free resins and bio-based fabrics to construct the interior, and it really is wonderful stuff. Rich textures abound in the FCX Clarity, including a tasteful wainscoting of walnut on the dash and doors. God only knows what all this costs. When I think about all the tooling used to build a mere 200 cars, I feel faint.

How does the FCX Clarity drive? Exactly like you would expect of an electric Honda Accord: eerily smooth, flawless in operation, confident and lively. The whack-bang of an internal-combustion engine—with the myriad second-order vibrations and gear whine—is supplanted by the ghostly murmurings of distant electrons, and so the gestalt of the car is serene, even tranquilizing.

Behold, the grand and lovely futility of the FCX Clarity. It's hard to scold something so wonderful, so I won't. Just bring me one that I can plug in.

NUTS & BOLTS

Price, as tested: $600 per month, lease only, including maintenance and collision insurance
Powertrain: Compressed hydrogen fuel-cell vehicle with 171-liter fuel tank; 100kW proton-exchange membrane fuel cell; AC synchronous permanent magnet motor; 288-volt lithium-ion traction battery; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive
Horsepower: 134
Torque: 188 pound-feet
Curb weight: 3,582 pounds
Top speed: 100 mph
0-60 mph: 9 seconds (est.)
Wheelbase: 110.2 inches
Overall length: 190.3 inches
EPA fuel economy: 74 miles per gasoline-gallon equivalent, combined city and highway
Final thought: Grand illusion

New lead rules send small dirt bikes to storage

HELENA, Mont. (AP)—A new national limit on lead in children's products—which has toy makers scrambling for new testing methods and retailers for storage space for inventory they're not sure they can sell—also is forcing motorcycle dealers to pull dirt bikes off showroom floors.

It became illegal Tuesday to sell off-road machines geared for children younger than 12 because parts in them contain lead at levels greater than 600 parts per million. Most motor vehicles have such parts.

"I think they took this law a little too far," said Margie Hicklin-Krsul, the owner of Redline Sports, a sports bike dealership in Butte. "I've never had anyone come in and say, 'My child keeps putting parts of his motorcycle into his mouth.'"

About 100,000 of the bikes—popular for trails, zipping around backyards and racing on motocross tracks—sold last year for $1,500 or more, according to industry estimates. The ban, not yet permanent, is a blow to motocross racers of any age who want a small bike and now won't be able to get new equipment or repair what they have.

AP

Trevor Swanson, 6, takes a closer look at the one remaining kids' mini-bikes on the showroom floor at Helena Cycle Center in Helena, Mont. on Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2009. Helena Cycle Center has chosen to keep their bikes on the floor in hopes that exemption the manufacturers have asked for on their products will be agreed upon by the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Dealerships—where sales already were sputtering due to the recession—received notices over the last month that they must pull the bikes off showroom floors. Industry leaders say some 13,000 dealers are now stuck with $100 million worth of inventory that may end up worthless.

Congress tightened lead limits on children's products last summer after a series of discoveries of dangerous lead levels in toys, and the rules took partial effect last week when a judge nixed a 12-month reprieve while the Consumer Products Safety Commission finalizes them.

The law won't be enforced for a year, but retailers can no longer sell products that contain materials in question. And they may find once the rules are clarified that the inventory now filling their storage rooms is worthless.

Congress is getting an earful. U.S. Rep. Danny Rehberg, R-Mont., fielding angry phone calls over the issue, blamed "government bureaucrats" for bungling implementation of the original law.

Makers of dirt bikes and motocross equipment are seeking an exemption for their products, but the federal consumer agency is still reviewing the request.

"We're hoping that they see their way to a difference between a children's necklace and a motor part that has very little chance of being ingested by a child," said Tim Patnode, spokesman for American Honda.

Dealers worry the ban will have the perverse effect of pushing kids onto larger, more powerful models if the ones running with engine displacement between 50 cubic centimeters and 100 are no longer available. They also say the ban will discourage families from introducing young riders to the sport.

Life & Style

From Saipan to Saigon

By KRISTI EATON
Kristi_eaton@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

I lied to most people about my trip to Ho Chi Minh City. The majority of people I spoke with before my departure thought I was going with a friend. A look of horror was usually the response I got when I told the handful of people the truth—I was traveling to a communist country by myself.

I wasn't too worried. I'd traveled by myself before. I was more worried about not going crazy spending the week alone than for my safety. But as a lone female traveler, I did take some precautions. I worked it all out beforehand. I was going to be a 26-year-old married Canadian who was meeting up with her husband. I even brought along a ring to wear if I needed to. Only those I felt safe around would find out I was really a 23-year-old single American.

So with my plan in mind, and my backpack and purse in hand, I was ready for Saigon.

If only it were that easy.

I got off the plane at midnight and headed straight for immigration, where I was denied entry into the country because of passport and visa issues. I've never had problems going through immigration before, although I'm always very nervous, which the officers tend to catch on to and give me 'a look' that then makes me even more nervous.

The fountain in front of the Reunification Palace, the former palace of South Vietnam before Saigon fell to the north on April 30, 1975.

My worst fear came true when the immigration officer said I couldn't enter the country. A thousand things were running through my mind, namely: It's midnight. I know no one. I can't leave the airport. I'm in a communist country.

I thought I was going to have to board a plane back to South Korea.

Thankfully, the combined look of fear and confusion on my face finally made an impact and an airport official helped me sort things out. Two hours after landing in Vietnam I was in a taxi heading to my hostel. Too bad the taxi driver didn't know where the hostel was located and didn't speak English. Great way to start the week, I thought to myself. The driver found the street—one of the busiest in the city—but couldn't find the actual building. We began to walk along the street at 1:30 in the morning. I never said I was smart, only adventurous.

A woman pushes a cart full of bread down a street in district 1 of Ho Chi Minh City.

Several street markets, selling food, clothing, drinks and other items, are open throughout the day.

Another man helped us out and 20 minutes later I collapse in bed, thankful to know that most strangers are kind and willing to help.

The next morning I woke up bright and early ready to experience Saigon. I had done some research beforehand and knew I wanted to visit the Reunification Palace and War Remnants Museum. Since I was staying in district 1, all the major sites were in walking distance. I started at the Notre Dame Cathedral, one of those places where you stand and look at the beauty of the architecture for a few minutes, snap a few photos and head on your way. Across the street was the main post office, which is a tourist attraction itself, and where I bought some postcards and mailed them off to family members.

Because nearly all the museums close during the lunch hour, I ate lunch before heading to the Reunification Palace around 1 pm. The Reunification Palace, also known as the Independence Palace, is the former palace of South Vietnam before Saigon fell to the north on April 30, 1975.

A replica of tank #843, which crashed through the gate, is parked on the lawn in front of the five-floor building. Admission is 15,000 Vietnamese dong for adults. (The exchange rate is approximately 17,500 dong to each U.S. dollar)

Next up was the War Remnants Museum, which, according to one guide I read, is where Americans can see all the atrocities our country ravaged on Vietnam. The guide wasn't joking. Picture after picture showed the devastating effects of Agent Orange and Pink on the bodies of survivors. Some victims, born as late as 1996, are still feeling the effects. Quotes made by U.S. officials admitting to alleged misdeeds lined the walls. One of the most interesting things I noticed about the museum was not what was in it, but who was in it. Everywhere I looked I saw only Caucasians and heard only American English. Other sites seemed to have an even distribution of ethnicities and nationalities, but not at this museum. Admission is 15,000 Vietnamese dong for adults.

Ho Chi Minh, known as the "Capital of Motorbikes," is teeming with millions of bikes.

After a full day of nothing but my own thoughts, I knew I needed to talk to people. So began my search for a new friend. I spotted two girls who I guessed correctly were Americans. We began chatting and decided to have dinner together. I think they were just as intrigued by my story of living on Saipan as I was by their story. Since September, they've been backpacking through New Zealand, Australia and, now, southeast Asia, spending the nights in hostels or camping and spending the day visiting museums, meeting people and trying to learn about different cultures. We ate at a little vegetarian restaurant down a side street and talked for hours, like we were old friends. That's one thing I've learned about traveling: you can bond really quickly, if you are open and want to.

Side streets lined with little restaurants and hostels are common in the city center.

The next day, my final in Vietnam, I began by walking around and exploring more of Saigon. I can walk for hours and love people watching.

I knew, even before I arrived, that I wanted to ride a motorbike.

As the "Capital of Motorbikes" it is not hard to find one to ride, especially when pegged as a tourist walking down the street.

I caved and took up one of the many offers to ride on the back of a bike for a small fee. I was just going to take it to Saigon River, not around the entire city, as is the norm. I just wanted to get the feel of it. But zooming through the streets of Ho Chi Minh was exhilarating and not half as scary as I thought it would be. I liked it so much I took the driver up on his offer and had him take me around the city, stopping at major sites like pagodas and the Opera House so I could take pictures. Unfortunately, riding a motorbike does not come without a possible injury, as I learned. I burned a small part of my leg on the tailpipe as I was getting off at one point. But the soon-to-develop scar will always be a reminder of my time in the country.

Shopping at the Ben Thanh Market was my last must-do for the trip. At this popular market, mostly packed full of tourists, one can find everything they need (and don't need)—shoes, chopsticks, coffee, picture frames, watches and much more. Such markets tend to overwhelm me. I had to prepare myself and make a full walk through before I made any purchasing decisions. I decided on several sets of chopsticks, a package of coffee (fun fact: Vietnam is the second largest coffee exporter, behind Brazil) and some sandals. I also bought some soup from one of the vendors in the market. Again, maybe not the smartest thing to do since I wasn't sure what I was eating and how it had been prepared, but this trip was obviously not about being safe.

Joaquin's Letterman appearance is instant classic

NEW YORK (AP)—One night after his memorably weird interview with actor Joaquin Phoenix, David Letterman made a joke in his "Late Show" monologue questioning whether Phoenix was on drugs.

The actor had appeared to forget the name of his "Two Lovers" co-star, Gwyneth Paltrow, stuck gum under the edge of Letterman's desk and apparently cursed at bandleader Paul Shaffer for laughing at him during Wednesday night's show. The appearance put Phoenix up with Farrah Fawcett on the list of late-night TV guests memorable for the wrong reasons.

Letterman on Thursday said that since so many of today's stars appear screwed up on one substance or another, "we've put together the 'Late Show' celebrity drug update."

Video of Olympics swimmer Michael Phelps appeared with the caption, "Michael Phelps: Weed." Baseball star Alex Rodriguez followed, captioned "Alex Rodriguez: 'Roids."

Then came a picture of Phoenix from the night before, wearing sunglasses and a long, black beard and the caption: "Joaquin Phoenix: ???????"

Phoenix's older brother, actor River Phoenix, died of a drug overdose outside a Los Angeles nightclub in 1993.

Hours after Joaquin Phoenix's Letterman appearance, which was punctuated by intervals of uncomfortable silence from both, it became an Internet sensation. By Thursday evening, it had been viewed more than 180,000 times on YouTube.

"I'm sorry you couldn't be here tonight," Letterman said at the interview's end.

Phoenix, a two-time Academy Award nominee, announced last October that he was quitting acting to concentrate on a career as a hip-hop musician. He has said that "Two Lovers," a romantic drama, is his last movie. It's such an odd career switch that some are wondering if it's all an act, particularly since Casey Affleck was following Phoenix with a camera to film him at the "Late Show." Phoenix has insisted it isn't.

AP

In this photo released by CBS, actor Joaquin Phoenix, left, waives to the audience from the set of the "The Late Show with David Letterman," in New York, Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2009 as host David Letterman watches from the desk.

Letterman drew immediate attention to Phoenix's appearance when the actor sat down for his interview.

"I will just say right off the top here, you look different than I remember you," the talk show host said. When he asked, "How is the beard?" and the audience laughed, Phoenix mumbled something about being made to feel weird about his appearance.

Phoenix appeared on the show to promote his movie. Letterman asked about Paltrow and momentarily forgot her name. Phoenix couldn't, or wouldn't, help him. Following a few seconds of uncomfortable silence, Letterman said, "Can you tell us about your days with the Unabomber?" Phoenix didn't reply, but allowed the slightest hint of a smile at the joke.

They talked about Phoenix's decision to quit acting. When Letterman asked why, Phoenix replied, "I don't know."

"Here's my hope, after a little time off—and I think you're taking a little time off tonight—I'm hopeful you will reconsider and come back to acting because there's nobody really better than you are," Letterman said.

Letterman veered between mocking Phoenix and trying with little success to draw something out of him. When Letterman asked if Phoenix had fun working with Isabella Rossellini, he said, "Yes," but was silent when questioned whether he had any stories to tell. "I'm sure something fun happened," Phoenix said.

Phoenix's desire to be a hip-hop musician was met with little enthusiasm from Letterman. "I'd love to come on the show and perform," Phoenix said.

"You know, that seems unlikely," Letterman said. "We'll certainly keep you in our Rolodex." The audience laughed and Phoenix said nothing.

Letterman asked Phoenix to introduce a clip from "Two Lovers," which seemed so unlikely given how the interview was going that Shaffer guffawed.

Phoenix turned to Shaffer, asking "are you ... serious?" with a word bleeped out. He wondered aloud why the audience was laughing at him. "What do you have them on? Is this nitrous?" Phoenix said.

And when Letterman noted that the actor was chewing gum during his interview, Phoenix took the wad from his mouth and stuck it under the lip of Letterman's desk.

The general weirdness made viewers—and Letterman—recall Farrah Fawcett's memorably spacey "Late Show" appearance in 1997. "We owe an apology to Farrah Fawcett," Letterman said at the interview's end. In Fawcett's appearance, the giggly, distracted actress talked about using her body parts to paint pictures and briefly thought Letterman's stage backdrop of a New York City skyline was real.

A spokeswoman for Phoenix did not return a call for comment on Thursday.

The 34-year-old star received Oscar nominations for his roles in "Gladiator" and "Walk the Line," for which he learned to play guitar to channel country legend Johnny Cash.

Phoenix, in a recent interview with The Associated Press, said that he grew his beard as a way of distancing himself musically with his best-known acting role, Johnny Cash. He acknowledged that his career change looked odd but said he is utterly serious about it

"I have better things to do than just, like, (mess) around with people," he said. "This is my life and this is my work, and this is the thing that I've been passionate about. Just because it's hard for other people to recognize and to see that, look, I get it, dude. I know that it seems ... weird. ... But I can't let that affect my life and the things that I want to do."

Martin Luther King III marks parents' India trip

ATLANTA (AP)—Martin Luther King III will lead a delegation including civil rights icons John Lewis and Andrew Young on a 13-day trip to India to mark the 50th anniversary of his parents' pilgrimage to the country to study nonviolence.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King, traveled to India in 1959, just four years after he successfully led the bus boycott in Montgomery, Ala., to end segregation on public transportation. After his trip, King was more determined to end racism through nonviolent means as a result of a deeper understanding of the principles he learned from Mahatma Gandhi, who used civil disobedience in the struggle for Indian independence in the early 20th century.

"Gandhi represents so much to me personally," King said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press on Thursday. "It's an incredible honor to be able to retrace those steps and meet with some of the people who were engaged with my parents."

King said he also looks forward to making the trip with Lewis and Young, who worked alongside his father during the civil rights movement.

"To have the opportunity to go with them is going to be a very special experience," he said.

The group leaves on Friday and returns Feb. 26. King is founder of Realizing the Dream Inc., a nonprofit organization he started in 2006 to continue his parents' work championing peace, justice and equality.

He said the philosophy of nonviolence is needed now more than ever. Among the cities he plans to visit is Mumbai, site of the November terrorist attacks which killed 164 people.

King said he expects the trip will be an inspirational one.

"It's like we're recommitting ourselves to fulfill the unfinished work of my parents and Gandhi," he said. "Fifty years after my dad went, I'm able to go to India as an ambassador of my father's legacy."

Wanda Sykes to entertain at correspondents' dinner

NEW YORK (AP)—Wanda Sykes will soon get the chance to make fun of President Barack Obama to his face.

The comic actress said that she has been selected as the entertainer at the annual White House Correspondents' Association annual dinner in Washington, slated for May 9.

Obama is expected to attend the black-tie affair at the Washington Hilton and to follow in his predecessors' tradition by putting on a comedy act of his own. The guest list of some 2,000 people will likely include the usual mix of Washington elite, White House press corps and Hollywood celebrities.

"The first thing I did when they asked me to do this gig—I made sure my taxes were paid," quipped Sykes, taking a dig at the withdrawal of former U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle from Obama's cabinet due to unpaid taxes.

Sykes, who booked the gig this week, said the idea of performing for such a high-profile crowd is "scary but very exciting." The dinner has tripped up comedians before. Rich Little and Stephen Colbert both provoked criticism of their performances before the crowd.

AP

In this June 5, 2008 file photo, comedian Wanda Sykes arrives at the annual spring gala for The Fresh Air Fund, benefiting summer vacations for inner city kids in New York.

She said it's her job to "poke fun and ridicule," and even a popular figure like Obama isn't off limits. She already has some ideas about what she could mine for laughs. For example, she noted, Obama can be "a little long-winded. So we can get him on that."

Sykes, 44, has established a comic identity around her blunt, feisty personality. Last year, the comedian publicly announced she is gay and spoke out against the passage of California's Proposition 8 to ban same-sex marriage. Sykes appears on "The New Adventures of Old Christine," and first made a name on TV with stints on "The Chris Rock Show" and "Curb Your Enthusiasm." Jennifer Loven of The Associated Press is president of the association and chose Sykes because of her fresh style and engaging stage presence.

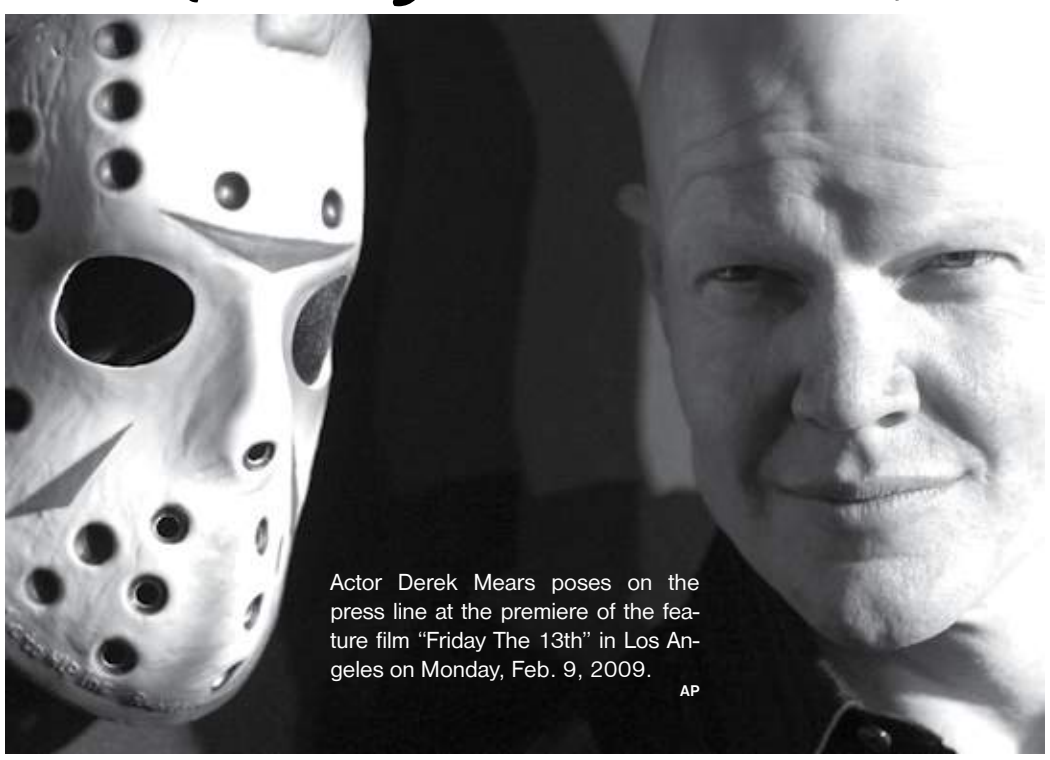
Sykes expects fumbles in the Obama administration between now and the correspondents' dinner.

"I'm not rooting against him at all, because, especially in this economy and everything, we need him to succeed," she says. "But there's gonna be some incidents and missteps, like we saw with the whole tax thing."

At the dinner, the association also presents its journalism awards as well as scholarships to aspiring reporters.

The White House Correspondents' Association was formed in 1914 as a liaison between the White House press corps and the presidents they cover. Every president since Calvin Coolidge has attended the dinner.

'Friday the 13th' nails No. 1 spot with $42.2M



Actor Derek Mears poses on the press line at the premiere of the feature film "Friday The 13th" in Los Angeles on Monday, Feb. 9, 2009. AP

LOS ANGELES (AP)—"Friday the 13th" had all the luck as the remake of the 1980 slasher flick opened with $42.2 million, putting blood and guts ahead of hearts over Valentine's Day weekend.

That was a record for the horror genre, topping the $39.1 million debut for 2004's "The Grudge." Accounting for today's higher admission prices, "The Grudge" sold slightly more tickets, however.

Released by the Warner Bros. banner New Line Cinema, "Friday the 13th" updates the grisly story of killer Jason Voorhees and his rampage among youths at a secluded summer camp.

On opening day—which fell on Friday the 13th—the remake pulled in $19.4 million, slightly more than the $19 million it cost to make the movie.

"It's a great title, and it was a great weekend to open. We had Friday the 13th and Valentine's Day," said Dan Fellman, head of distribution for Warner Bros. "I've seen it play a number of times, and the audience is with it the whole way. A lot of screams and a lot of laughs."

The "Friday the 13th" series has been one of the most-enduring horror franchises, spawning 10 sequels, including the crossover grudge match "Freddy Vs. Jason," pitting Voorhees against the boogeyman from "A Nightmare on Elm Street."

The movie bumped off the previous weekend's top earner, the Warner-New Line romance "He's Just Not That Into You," which fell to second-place but held up strongly over Valentine's weekend with $19.6 million, according to studio estimates Sunday.

1. "Friday the 13th," $42.2 million.
2. "He's Just Not That Into You," $19.6 million.
3. "Taken," $19.3 million.
4. "Confessions of a Shopaholic," $15.4 million.
5. "Coraline," $15.3 million.
6. "Paul Blart: Mall Cop," $11.7 million.
7. "The International," $10 million.
8. "The Pink Panther 2," $9 million.
9. "Slumdog Millionaire," $7.2 million.
10. "Push," $6.9 million.

Among other new movies, Disney's comedy "Confessions of a Shopaholic" landed in fourth-place with $15.4 million, while Sony's thriller "The International" is No. 7 with $10 million.

"Confessions of a Shopaholic" stars Isla Fisher as a magazine retail writer coping with her own compulsive buying habits. "The International" features Clive Owen as an Interpol agent and Naomi Watts as a prosecutor uncovering a bank's global misdeeds.

The combination of solid debuts and strong holdovers lifted Hollywood to its best President's Day weekend ever. The three-day overall total of $190 million blew away the previous best of $157.1 million over President's Day weekend in 2007, according to box-office tracker Media By Numbers.

For the year, revenues continue to soar, with revenue at $1.44 billion, up 22 percent through the same point in 2008. Factoring in 2009's higher ticket prices, movie attendance is running 20 percent higher than last year's.

"Hollywood seems to be unstoppable right now. With this notion of the recession helping the box office, I guess this is just another example of that," said Paul Dergarabedian, president of Media By Numbers. "People want to go to the movies and just have fun and escape. `Friday the 13th,' as scary as your mortgage banker is, Jason's scarier."

Academy Awards frontrunner "Slumdog Millionaire" heads into Oscar weekend with sturdy box-office momentum. The Fox Searchlight release took in $7.2 million, raising its 14-week total to $86.5 million.

"Slumdog Millionaire" has dominated at earlier Hollywood honors and is considered the likely best-picture winner at next Sunday's Oscars.

"The awareness for the film just keeps increasing every week," said Richard Shamban, vice president of distribution for Fox Searchlight. "The publicity from the awards themselves will continue to help, win or lose."

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Media By Numbers LLC. Final figures will be released Monday.

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Friday The 13th
Friday 4:20 7:05 10:00
Sat & Sun 1:05 4:20 7:05 10:00
Monday 1:05 4:20 7:05
Tuesday 4:20 7:05
Jared Padalecki, Amanda Righetti
Horror, Remake • Rated R
Synopsis
Clay searches for his missing sister in the eerie woods of legendary Crystal Lake, where he stumbles on the creaky remains of rotting old cabins behind moss-covered trees. And that's not the only thing lying in wait under the brush. Against the advice of police and cautions from the locals, Clay pursues what few leads he has, with the help of a young woman he meets among a group of college kids up for an all-thrills weekend.
★ ★ ★

Pink Panther 2
Friday 4:10 7:10 9:30
Sat & Sun 1:15 4:10 7:10 9:30
Monday 1:15 4:10 7:10
Tuesday 4:10 7:10
Steve Martin, Andy Garcia
Comedy, Mystery • Rated PG
Synopsis
The continuing adventures of Inspector Jacques Clouseau. When legendary treasures from around the world are stolen, including the priceless Pink Panther Diamond, Chief Inspector Dreyfus (John Cleese) is forced to assign Clouseau to a team of international detectives and experts charged with cathcing the thief and retrieving the stolen artifacts.

Ang Tanging Ina N'yong Lahat
Friday 4:25 7:20 9:50
Sat & Sun 1:30 4:25 7:20 9:50
Monday 1:30 4:25 7:20
Tuesday 4:25 7:20
Ai-Ai de las Alas, Eugene Domingo
Comedy • Rated PG
Synopsis
With the one, big, happy family that she has, any woman would admire Ina Montecillo (Ai-Ai de las Alas) as the embodiment of a perfect mother. But after more than 40 years of doing everything for her family, she realizes she hasn't done anything for herself. Ina then embarks on a journey of finding her self-worth that surprisingly lands her as the president of the Philippines!

Push
Friday 4:15 7:30 9:40
Sat & Sun 1:10 4:15 7:30 9:40
Monday 1:10 4:15 7:30
Tuesday 4:15 7:30
Chris Evans, Dakota Fanning
Thriller Supernatural • Rated PG 13

Coraline
Friday 4:05 7:25 9:35
Sat & Sun 1:20 4:05 7:25 9:35
Monday 1:20 4:05 7:25
Tuesday 4:05 7:25
Dakota Fanning, John Hodgman
Fantasy, Animated • Rated PG

Taken
Friday 4:30 7:15 9:55
Sat & Sun 1:25 4:30 7:15 9:55
Monday 1:25 4:30 7:15
Tuesday 4:30 7:15
Liam Neeson, Maggie Grace
Action, Drama, Thriller • Rated PG 13

He's Just Not That Into You
Friday 4:00 7:00 9:45
Sat & Sun 1:00 4:00 7:00 9:45
Monday 1:00 4:00 7:00
Tuesday 4:00 7:00
Jennifer Aniston, Scarlett Johansson
Romatic Comedy • Rated PG 13
● NO PASSES ■ NO PASSES OR SUPER SAVERS
GIFT CERTIFICATES AVAILABLE • R-RATED FILMS REQUIRE PHOTO I.D.
www.gohollywood.com

Urban avoids 'Days of Thunder' plug at Daytona

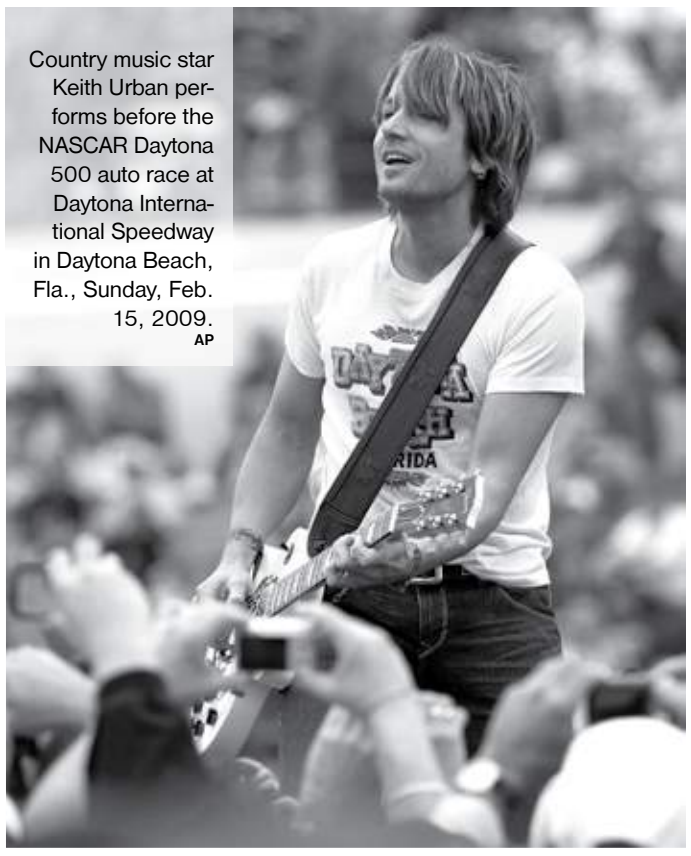
DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP)—Country music star Keith Urban performed a surprise two-song set for reporters to kick off his day at the Daytona 500, where he was the featured artist for Sunday's prerace concert.

"First time playing a press room," he quipped before launching into "Sister Golden Hair" by America.

It was the first press room concert performed by any of the musical acts that Daytona International Speedway officials have brought before the media. Urban said he wasn't trying to one-up previous music guests Big & Rich, Bon Jovi or Brooks & Dunn, but played because "I just wanted to get in my comfort zone."

Urban took brief questions and laughed awkwardly when asked what his favorite racing movie is. "Uhhhhh ... 'Cars'?" he stammered, choosing the animated movie over the more obvious "Days of Thunder" that featured his wife, Nicole Kidman, with her ex-husband, Tom Cruise.

Later, Urban and Cruise both attended the pre-race driver meeting. The two were seated on opposite ends, but Cruise heartily applauded Urban when the singer was introduced.



Country music star Keith Urban performs before the NASCAR Daytona 500 auto race at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla., Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009. AP

Urban also joked to reporters that he's never driven more than 65 mph in his personal car, before coming clean.

"Maybe 130," he said was his fastest. "It was pretty insane. It was only for a glimpse."

Urban is scheduled to perform three songs from his new album "Sweet Thing," which is set for release next month. He performed the title track for reporters to end the 10-minute session.

Urban also said he and Kidman were glad to offer their support to victims of the wildfires in their native Australia. The couple recently donated more than $300,000 to a relief fund.

Chris Brown says he's 'sorry and saddened'

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Chris Brown, who was arrested a week ago in connection with a domestic violence investigation, said Sunday he is "sorry and saddened" by what happened and is seeking counseling from his pastor and loved ones.

The 19-year-old R&B singer also said much of what has been reported of the incident is untrue, although he did not elaborate.

"Words cannot begin to express how sorry and saddened I am over what transpired. I am seeking the counseling of my pastor, my mother and other loved ones and I am committed, with God's help, to emerging a better person," Brown said in a statement issued through publicist Michael Sitrick.

"Much of what has been speculated or reported on blogs and-or reported in the media is wrong," he added. But he said he couldn't discuss that in detail until his case is resolved.

He also said he has not posted any comments about the incident on Facebook or any other Web site. "Those posts or writings under my name are frauds," he said.

AP

In this June 6, 2008 file photo, the audience reaches out to touch singer Chris Brown during his appearance on the NBC "Today" television program, in New York's Rockefeller Center.

Brown surrendered to Los Angeles police on Feb. 8 and was released on $50,000 bail after being booked for investigation of making a criminal threat, a felony. He has not been charged by the district attorney's office, which is still investigating the case.

His arrest reportedly stemmed from an argument with his girlfriend, fellow singer Rihanna, shortly after they left a pre-Grammy Awards party.

Both were nominated for Grammys and were scheduled to appear at the Feb. 8 awards show but canceled at the last minute. Brown surrendered to authorities just as the show was getting under way.

According to police, Brown and a woman began arguing as they were traveling in a car shortly after the Feb. 7 party. The fight escalated after they got out of the car, and Brown had left by the time officers arrived.

After Brown's arrest, gum maker Wrigley announced last week that it was suspending an ad campaign featuring Brown plugging Doublemint chewing gum.

Obama plans concert for Stevie Wonder

Stevie Wonder performs at the 40th NAACP Image Awards on Thursday, Feb. 12, 2009,in Los Angeles.

AP

WASHINGTON (AP)—The White House is planning a concert this month to honor Stevie Wonder, whose music provided part of President Barack Obama's campaign soundtrack.

The White House says the president and first lady Michelle Obama will present Wonder a Library of Congress award on Feb. 25. The concert will be broadcast the next day on PBS as part of its "Performance at the White House" series.

The award-winning and chart-topping Wonder performed at the Democratic National Convention in Denver on the night Obama accepted his party's nomination. He also performed at a concert during the week of Obama's inauguration.

His song "Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours" became a theme song during the campaign. Obama also used "Higher Ground" during campaign stops.

A conversation with Greg "He's Just Not That Into You" Behrendt

By TERRI RUPAR
(C) 2009, THE WASHINGTON POST

Greg Behrendt has made a pretty good career out of six words. The stand-up comic and former consultant for "Sex and the City" was the source of "He's just not that into you," a line that Carrie's boyfriend Berger said to Miranda about one of her dates in the last season. Then Behrendt and "Sex" writer Liz Tuccillo said it to the world in a book, and Behrendt went on "Oprah" and had a short-lived talk show that aired on the WB network and wrote a relationship book with his wife and starred in a recent six-episode show on SoapNet in which he helped couples in trouble. This month, a movie inspired by the phrase came out, with Behrendt in a cameo as a priest.

Q: Did you feel like "He's just not that into you" was your best, most decisive line ever?

A: I said it genuinely to somebody at work about their relationship. We weren't sitting around and thinking about things to say. I genuinely said, "Well, that guy doesn't want to sleep with you, he doesn't really like you, he's just not that into you."

When you love somebody you kind of cut the (expletive). You know them well enough that you can call them out and say, "No, that guy's a retard. Knock it off."

Q: You've written a couple of books, you had a talk show, now you have this show on SoapNet and the movie's coming out. How did that all happen?

A: It's like this gift bag. Suddenly if you're a person in the world that has an opinion, people offer you stuff. ...

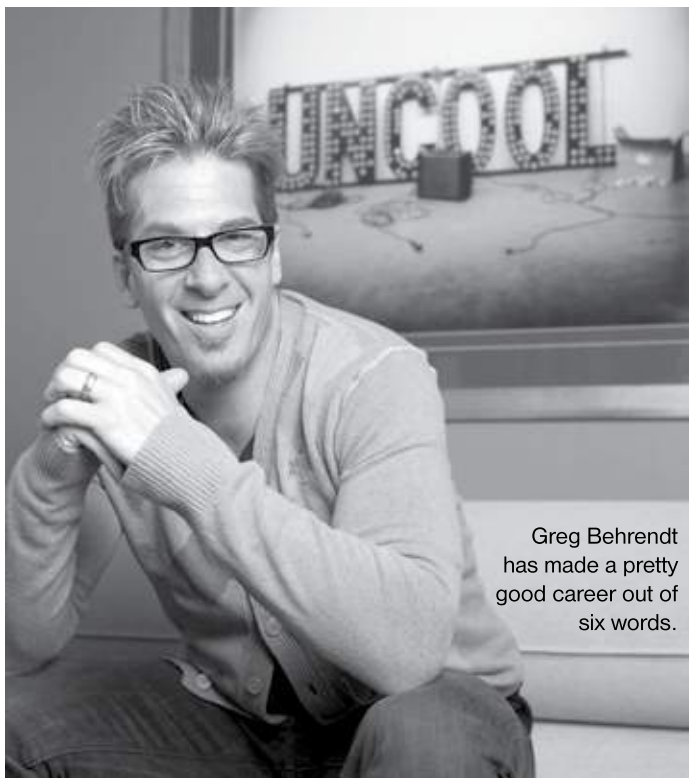
Q: Is it part of your goal to get someone to get professional help?

A: We're the red light to let you know that your engine's having trouble. But you gotta get it to the shop. If I'm the last stop, you're in trouble.

Q: What comes next?

A: I've found that when I just sort of let life happen, all these opportunities came.... You couldn't pick this career out as a young person: "You know what I'd like to do, I think somewhere around 40, I'd like to coin a phrase. And ride that wave. But I'm going to wait until I'm 39, 40 years old for it to happen."

(I) certainly don't want to be received as someone who thinks he's a genius.



Greg Behrendt has made a pretty good career out of six words.

Woman questions belief that there's no place like home

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
FROM UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

DearAbby

DEAR ABBY: Is it possible—or normal—for someone to lack the desire to travel? I am a 23-year-old female college graduate with a good job. I am involved in a serious relationship and still live with my parents because of financial constraints. I like to think my life is pretty normal.

When my friends graduated from college, they all backpacked through Europe before starting their jobs. I was content to stay home, relax and readjust to life off-campus. Now that my friends are accruing vacation time, they are planning all sorts of trips—cruises, vacations, road trips to visit old roommates, etc. None of this appeals to me.

I am a nervous traveler and tend to feel uncomfortable when I'm outside my "comfort zone." I'm not afraid to admit that I can be uptight, and I don't "roll with the punches" very well.

Last summer my boyfriend and I spent several weekends in a beach town about two hours away. I had a great time, although I was just as happy to go home at the end. I am not depressed or aloof. Give me an afternoon at the local mall or a movie rather than a weekend in Las Vegas. Am I weird?

HOMEBODY IN MASSACHUSETTS

DEAR HOMEBODY: Weird? No. However, because of your reluctance to step out of your "comfort zone," you are missing an opportunity to learn firsthand that this country—and the world around you—is filled with wonderful people who would be worth knowing if you could only broaden your horizons. If this didn't bother you on some level, you would not have written me. A therapist who specializes in anxiety disorders could help you do that. I wish you good luck—and maybe even "bon voyage."

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: My boyfriend of 10 years, "Simon," comes from a broken home. His mother left when he was quite young and as a result, his food choices are horrible. Simon is 30 now and eats only hamburgers, french fries, pizza and other fried or carb-loaded food. He includes absolutely no vegetables or lean protein in his diet.

I love my boyfriend and can't imagine spending my life with anyone else. I have tried to get him to consider other foods to no avail. I'm afraid that he is slowly killing himself. He has packed on some weight since we've been together. I wouldn't call him obese, but I see what's coming. He drinks only sugar-loaded soda and hasn't seen a doctor since he was 18. I love all kinds of foods. What can I do to bring Simon over to my side?

WORRIED ABOUT SIMON IN CONNECTICUT

DEAR WORRIED: Until your boyfriend is willing to face the fact that he has a problem, and is willing to do something about it, there is nothing you or I can do. Simon may eat the way he does because he has abandonment issues or because he never learned proper eating habits in the first place. But until he's willing to face up to what's eating him and change the way he is eating, nothing will change.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I am 19 and have been with my girlfriend for the last four years. I want to take a break and see what else is out there, but I don't know how to tell her without freaking her out and making her cry. Abby, how do I tell a girl who loves me that I want to take a break and see other people?

TEEN IN MINNESOTA

DEAR TEEN: Do it in person and in plain English before you waste one more minute of her time. When you do, be sure to tell her that the reason has nothing to do with her and everything to do with you. Be prepared for the fact there may be tears. However, not every relationship is permanent, and breaking up is part of dating.

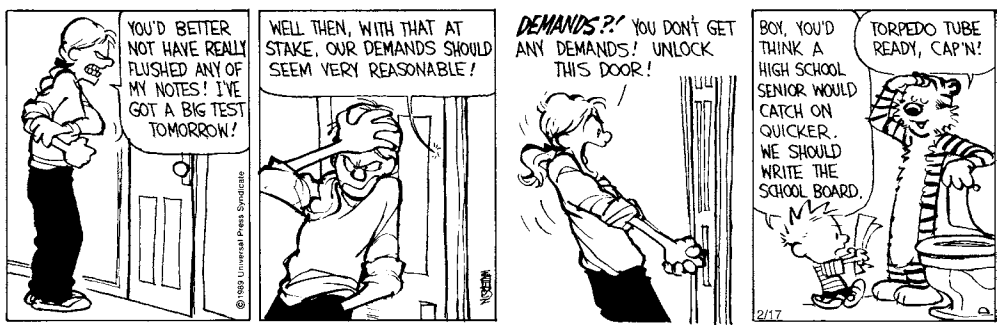
Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

For everything you need to know about wedding planning, order "How to Have a Lovely Wedding." Send a business-sized, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for $6 (U.S. funds only) to: Dear Abby—Wedding Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included in the price.)

Pastimes

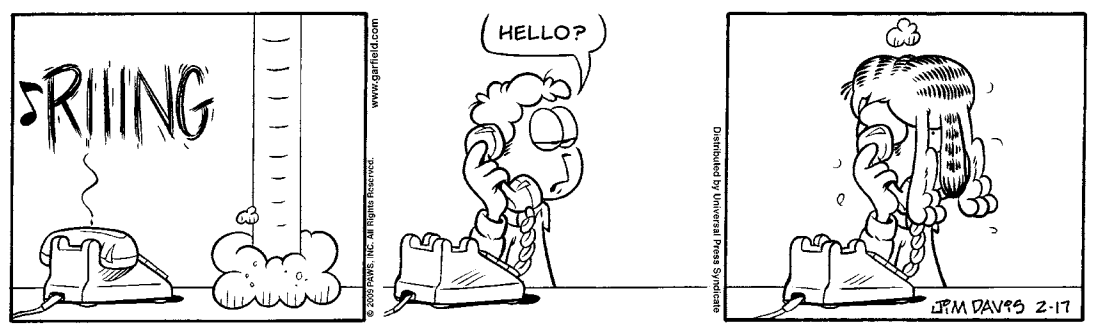
Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


YOU'D BETTER NOT HAVE REALLY FLUSHED ANY OF MY NOTES! I'VE GOT A BIG TEST TOMORROW!
WELL THEN, WITH THAT AT STAKE, OUR DEMANDS SHOULD SEEM VERY REASONABLE!
DEMANDS?! YOU DON'T GET ANY DEMANDS! UNLOCK THIS DOOR!
BOY, YOU'D THINK A HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR WOULD CATCH ON QUICKER. WE SHOULD WRITE THE SCHOOL BOARD.
TORPEDO TUBE READY, CAP'N!
© 1989 Universal Press Syndicate
2/17

Garfield®

By Jim Davis



Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy

You KNOW, ENO, IT'S OKAY iF You Lie A LiTTLE ON YOUR ONLiNE DATiNG PROFiLE.
Like HOW?
WELL, FOR EXAMPLE, LiST YOUR HOBBIES AS THiNGS Like JUDO, RACiNG SPORTS CARS,...
YEAH. You're RIGHT.
THAT SOUNDS BETTER THAN "POPPiNG BUBBLE WRAP."
2007 © Glenn McCoy/Dist. by Universal Press Syndicate
Glenn McCoy
2-17-09

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Fishing spear
5 Impale
9 Supreme Being
12 Hodge-podge
13 Met melody
14 Anger
15 April paper-work
17 "Do the Right Thing" director
18 Elbow counter-part
19 Private instructor
21 Fathered
24 Relaxa-tion
25 Took care of weeds
26 PC peripheral
30 Lamb's dam
31 Anna of "Scary Movie"
32 Coll. transcript stat
33 Dadaism pioneer
35 Existed
36 Pub orders
37 Bygone
38 Greedy cry
40 Highly rated
42 Blackbird
43 Speak elo-quently
48 Heavy weight
49 Neighbor-hood
50 Heming-way nickname
51 Hydro-carbon suffix
52 Scream
53 Location

DOWN
1 Under-stood
2 Carte lead-in
3 Repair
4 Like a snake's tongue
5 Fill to excess
6 Verifiable
7 Atmo-sphere
8 Small chickens
9 Of the best quality
10 Sandwich treat
11 Ante-lope's playmate
16 Conclu-sion
20 GIs' entertain-ment org.
21 Son of Noah
22 Hawk-eyes' home
23 Double-check
24 Egress
26 Bleacher-ites
27 MGM motto start
28 Foil's kin
29 "Death in Venice" author
31 Big road
34 Shade source
35 Censors, in a way
37 Yoko of music
38 Fence opening
39 A party to
40 Skating jump
41 October birthstone
44 100 square meters
45 Spigot
46 Nasdaq debut
47 Heathcliff, for one

Solution time: 21 mins.

I	N	C	A	■	P	E	R	■	C	A	M	P
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S	E	T	T	L	E	U	P	■	R	O	T	E
■	■	■	F	I	T	■	R	A	N	G	E	R
A	L	B	U	M	■	E	I	R	E	■	■	■
B	I	E	L	■	U	P	S	T	A	R	T	■
S	E	E	■	K	N	E	E	S	■	O	A	F
■	U	P	R	I	S	E	S	■	C	L	U	E
■	■	■	W	E	T	S	■	W	A	L	T	Z
I	M	P	A	L	A	■	E	A	R	■	■	■
S	O	O	N	■	B	U	C	K	L	E	U	P
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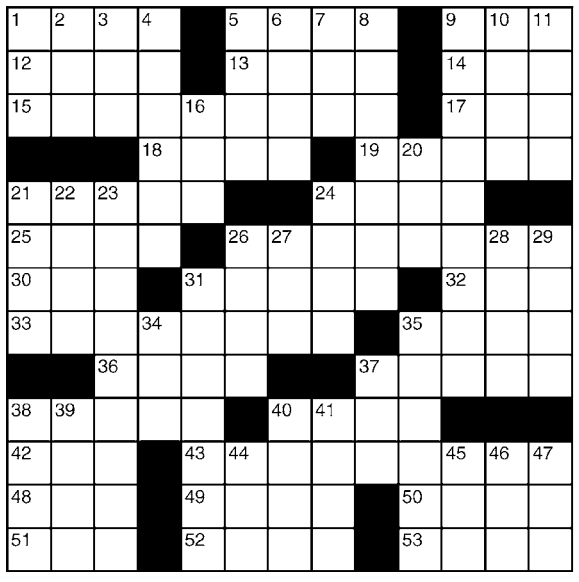
Yesterday's answer 2-17



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Joseph Gordon-Levitt, 28; Paris Hilton, 28; Bryan White, 35; Rene Russo, 55

Happy Birthday: Adventure awaits you if you are quick to respond to suggestions, dares and offers. Uncertainty about current relationships should be dealt with. You cannot push others but you can push yourself, so focus on what you want to accomplish this year. Your numbers are 10, 17, 19, 24, 28, 34, 46

ARIES (*March 21-April 19*): Concentrate on making money. Make a list of all the acquaintances you have made in the past who might be interested in your plans and start cold-calling. Once you have your team together, the rest will be easy. ✪✪✪✪

TAURUS (*April 20-May 20*): Don't believe everything you are told. Anyone trying to discourage you from following your dreams should be shut out of your circle. Home will be your refuge, even if there is someone causing you grief. ✪✪✪

GEMINI (*May 21-June 20*): Work partnerships and love are all looking extremely positive if you make a move. You can advance by sharing your ideas with a superior, by starting your own business or even by turning something you love into a paying service. ✪✪✪

CANCER (*June 21-July 22*): Beware of anyone with a fancy idea trying to get you to invest or donate. Love is in the stars and, with a little Cancer charm, you will entice someone you think is special to engage in a little fun. ✪✪✪

LEO (*July 23-Aug. 22*): You've got a lot going for you so harness and run with it. Love, travel and intrigue are looking positive. Someone you have known for a long time will be interested in what you are doing. Together you can achieve everything you desire. ✪✪✪✪✪

VIRGO (*Aug. 23-Sept. 22*): You can't put all your hopes on one person or project or you will be disappointed. Expand your way of thinking and be innovative and imaginative if you want to excel. Don't overspend. ✪✪

LIBRA (*Sept. 23-Oct. 22*): Your ingenious ideas and your creative touch will attract a lot of potential partners. Present and promote whatever it is you want and you will be successful. Love is on the rise. ✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO (*Oct. 23-Nov. 21*): Protect whatever you cherish. You are up for change and, if you want to maintain certain aspects of your life, it will be necessary to fight for them. Focus on success and positive action. ✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS (*Nov. 22-Dec. 21*): Take a ride on the wild side and you will spark enthusiasm in others. Someone will have your vision and stand by your side. Love is reaching an all time high and favorable changes at home can be made. ✪✪✪

CAPRICORN (*Dec. 22-Jan. 19*): You may be feeling a little pushy but, if you aren't careful, you will end up doing things alone. A short trip or visiting someone who can steer you in the right direction will help you decipher your next step. Volunteer for something you believe in. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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AQUARIUS (*Jan. 20-Feb. 18*): A chance to get ahead is evident and someone who has always been there for you will help. Talk over your plans and you will get greater insight into what is and isn't possible. Someone from your past will surface; don't go there. ✪✪✪✪

PISCES (*Feb. 19-March 20*): At some point you have to trust someone, so open up discussions regarding your ideas and plans for the future. Someone from your past can help you. The uncertainties about a past partnership should not stop you. ✪✪

Birthday Baby: You have drive and tenacity. You are aggressive and have strength of character and a charismatic charm. You are an adventurer.

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SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

4				7				8
		5	3		8	1		
	8						4	
	9		5		4		6	
1				2				9
	2		9		3		8	
	1						7	
		9	2		6	3		
6				8				5

Difficulty Level ★★ 2/17

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's SUDOKU Answer

2	8	7	9	6	3	4	5	1
5	3	1	7	4	8	9	2	6
4	6	9	1	5	2	7	8	3
9	5	6	2	8	4	1	3	7
7	2	3	5	9	1	8	6	4
1	4	8	3	7	6	2	9	5
6	9	5	8	1	7	3	4	2
3	1	4	6	2	9	5	7	8
8	7	2	4	3	5	6	1	9

Difficulty Level ★ 2/16

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and **CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD.** The leftover letters spell the Wonderword.

RUBE GOLDBERG CONTRAPTIONS **Solution: 7 letters**

C	I	S	S	A	L	C	C	U	P	S	R	A	E	G
C	O	M	P	L	I	C	A	T	E	D	T	M	B	S
S	C	M	A	S	I	M	P	L	E	S	A	A	L	T
L	O	G	I	C	D	H	D	E	Y	V	L	I	M	E
E	N	U	P	C	H	N	I	N	E	L	A	L	E	P
E	S	T	P	U	A	I	D	L	T	P	R	N	T	O
H	(T)	Y	L	H	L	I	N	R	A	P	M	O	A	S
W	R	(S)	I	U	C	I	A	E	R	R	F	I	R	T
T	U	A	(E)	A	S	L	T	K	O	A	I	T	T	A
C	C	E	T	(T)	U	E	S	Z	M	H	L	O	S	G
E	T	I	R	P	L	A	R	L	E	S	M	M	U	E
N	O	I	O	P	T	C	E	I	M	R	W	O	L	S
N	P	P	O	W	A	R	D	K	M	E	G	O	L	F
O	R	E	E	N	I	G	N	E	O	S	S	S	I	M
C	P	B	A	T	H	T	U	B	C	A	N	A	R	Y

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Alarm, Ball, Bathtub, Canary, Classic, Comic, Commemorate, Complicated, Connect, Construct, Cups, Draw, Easy, Engineer, Film, Gears, Golf, Handles, Hilarious, Illustrate, Like, Logic, Machine, Mail, Miss, Motion, Pails, People, Popular, Postage, Pulitzer, Result, Sharp, Simple, Slow, Soup, Stamp, Step, Strip, Syndication, Task, Test, Understand, Wheels

Yesterday's Answer: Upscale

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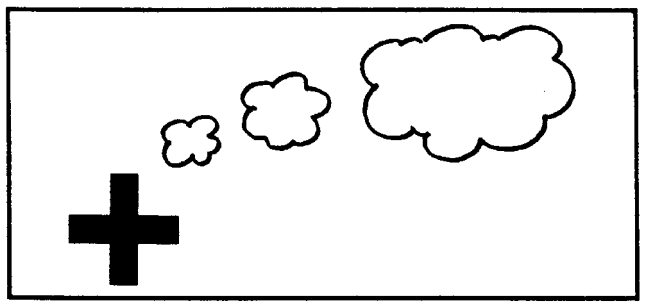

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Shaq, Kobe winners again in All-Star game

PHOENIX (AP)—Shaq danced, Kobe dazzled.

And just like old times, they won again.

Bryant led all scorers with 27 points, O'Neal partied his way back onto the All-Star stage with 17 in just 11 minutes, and the Western Conference beat the East 146-119 Sunday night.

Back on the same team for the first time in nearly five years, the three-time champions shared the game MVP award. They helped the West get untracked after an awful start, then teamed up for a few buckets that helped blow it open in the third quarter.

And they did it in the ways that made them so different—Bryant with his cold-as-ice stare and focus, O'Neal as the oversized clown who made fans and foes alike laugh.

It was their first time on the floor as teammates since the 2004 NBA finals. O'Neal was traded to Miami that summer, breaking apart a duo that produced three straight titles but was perhaps better known for its frequent feuding that made the breakup inevitable.

"It felt like flashbacks," O'Neal said during an interview on TNT. "It felt like '99 to '02."

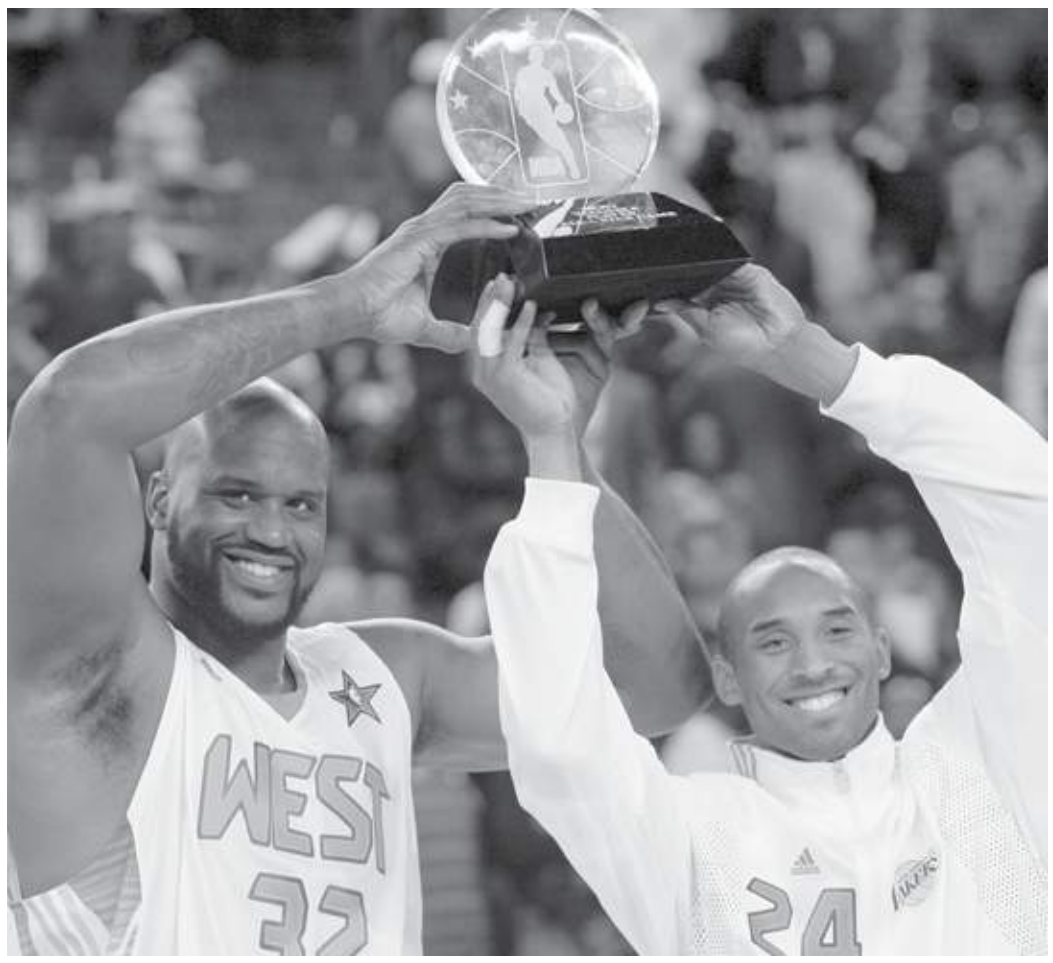
Bryant and O'Neal shared a slight hug after being announced as MVPs, then playfully fought over the trophy commissioner David Stern handed to them. They joined Bob Pettit, who won four times, and Michael Jordan and Oscar Robertson as the only three-time All-Star MVPs.

Amare Stoudemire scored 19 for the West, which bounced back from its loss last year in New Orleans, when Bryant was limited to just a few minutes of action while resting a dislocated pinkie finger.

"We wanted to be aggressive," Bryant said. "We talked about it before going out there, we wanted to play. We lost last year and we wanted to make sure we came out here and played the game hard, come out here with a win."

LeBron James led the East with 20 points. Paul Pierce and Dwyane Wade each scored 18.

O'Neal missed the All-Star game last year after 14 straight selections, and he brought back his unmatched entertaining abilities. Players were introduced on a stage behind the Jabbawockeez, a hip-hop dance group. O'Neal, the last reserve to come out, was wearing one of their masks and boogied along with them before taking his spot on the court.



AP

Western All-Star Shaquille O'Neal (32) of the Phoenix Suns and Western All-Star Kobe Bryant (24) of the Los Angeles Lakers share the MVP award from the NBA All-Star basketball game Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009, in Phoenix.

"I wanted to do something a little different and unique," O'Neal said. "I realized that this may possibly be my last one, so I wanted to make it memorable for myself and the fans."

He later jazzed up a comedy skit in which players sang love songs for a fake Valentine's Day CD with an energetic rendition of Billy Ocean's "Caribbean Queen."

The weekend festivities were a welcome distraction for Phoenix basketball fans, whose disappointing Suns were apparently in the process of dismantling their team while the fun was going on around them.

Phoenix coach Terry Porter will be fired Monday and replaced by assistant Alvin Gentry, a person familiar with the decision told The Associated Press. The person spoke Sunday night on condition of anonymity because the official announcement had not been made.

The changes may not stop there.

Stoudemire, who started for the West, is the biggest name involved in trade rumors ahead of next week's deadline. Just in case he won't be seen again for a while, Stoudemire earned a pair

of loud ovations before the game from the celebrity-filled crowd that included Muhammad Ali, plus Sen. John McCain sitting four seats away from Spike Lee.

O'Neal also could be moved, and he showed he's still got plenty of game left if somebody wants him.

The East started quickly, while the West missed nine of its first 11 shots and trailed 20-10 when West coach Phil Jackson called timeout and inserted O'Neal with 5:44 remaining in the first quarter. The West scored the next 11 points with Shaq and Kobe on the floor, part of a 19-0 run that made it 27-20.

O'Neal, enjoying a resurgence this season after an injury-plagued 2007-08, had three baskets and set up another during the run. There was little interaction between he and Bryant, who both insist they've patched things up, aside from normal basketball plays.

O'Neal returned midway through the third quarter with the West already ahead by double digits. Bryant set him up for a layup, then made one himself for a 97-85 lead.

"It is fun to see them compete like they did tonight," James said.

O'Neal scored the next eight West points, including one basket when Bryant fed him for a dunk. Another came when he ran a give-and-go with Hornets guard Chris Paul—with O'Neal feeding the 6-foot Paul in the post and swooping in from the perimeter for a dunk.

Paul, Brandon Roy, Pau Gasol and Tony Parker all finished with 14 points for the West.

NBA *sophomores defeat rookies, 122-116*

PHOENIX (AP)—Oklahoma City's Kevin Durant scored a Rookie Challenge-record 46 points to lead the NBA's sophomores to a 122-116 victory over the rookies on Friday night.

Durant shattered the record of 36 set by Phoenix's Amare Stoudemire as a sophomore in 2004. Durant helped hold off a late charge by the rookies with a three-point play, an emphatic dunk and two free throws in the final minutes.

Michael Beasley of Miami led the rookies with 29 points.

Oft-injured Portland center Greg Oden was a late scratch with a sore left knee after bumping into Golden State's Corey Maggette on Thursday night. Though he was drafted two years ago, Oden was a member of the rookie team because he missed last season with injuries.

The sophomore squad has won the last seven in the game designed to showcase some of the league's bright young talent during its All-Star weekend festivities.

The rookies closed to 119-116 on a jumper by O.J. Mayo with 11 seconds left. But Durant made two free throws to push the lead back to five.

"I approached it like a regular game," Durant said. "I wanted to go out and have fun. Fortunately my shots were going down."

A lot of shots were successful in the procession of uncontested layups and wide-open 3-pointers.

In the first of two 20-minute halves, the sophomores shot 68.4 percent from the floor, including 63.6 percent from beyond the arc. The rookies lagged at an almost embarrassing 52.6 percent from the field, and 40 percent from 3-point range, but still led 61-58 at intermission.

Each bucket brought shrieks from thousands of pink-clad schoolchildren in prime seats in the lower bowl of U.S. Airways Center.

"It is one of the bigger stages," Durant said before the game. "We just want to do it justice by coming out and playing hard."

Durant played hard from the start. He hit 17 of 25 shots from the floor, 4-of-8 from beyond the arc, and made all eight of his free throws. Durant also tied for the team lead with seven rebounds.

Durant was no ballhog. On a two-on-none breakaway in the second half, the crowd roared in anticipation as Durant dribbled toward the bucket. But Durant flicked the ball off the backboard to the 6-foot Aaron Brooks, who caught the pass but missed the jam.

Brooks may have been blinded by Durant's Day-Glo orange high-tops, easily the game's most dazzling fashion statement.

The only thing brighter was a canary vest worn by rookies assistant coach Dwyane Wade, who otherwise looked like a professor in his spectacles, bow tie and gray suit.

Wade served as an assistant to rookies coach Kurt Rambis, while Dwight Howard assisted sophomores coach John Kuester.

The teams wore jerseys—white for the sophomores, purple for the rookies—designed by 18-year-old Tim Ahmed from East Meadow, N.Y. It was the first time a fan-designed jersey has ever been worn during an NBA game or event; in the past, rookies and sophomores wore their regular team jerseys.

The game was more about having fun than actual competition. But Beasley said he came to win.

"It is not cool when you lose," he said before the game. "I like to be the cool guy. Cool guys don't lose. I will play hard."

There was plenty of good-natured showboating. Rookie guard Russell Westbrook dunked and then bobbed his head at Durant, his Oklahoma City teammate.

When Durant hung on the rim after an emphatic dunk early in the second half, Beasley signaled for a technical foul. The officials simply smiled.

Source: Porter out as Suns' coach, Gentry in

PHOENIX (AP)—Suns coach Terry Porter will be fired Monday and replaced by assistant Alvin Gentry, a person familiar with the decision said Sunday night.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the official announcement had not been made.

The move was first reported by *The Arizona Republic* on its Web site Sunday.

The Suns were attempting, without success, to avoid making news over the All-Star weekend being staged on their home turf. The franchise also is in talks with numerous teams about trading Amare Stoudemire, a starter in Sunday night's All-Star game.

Porter was four months into his first season on the three-year, $6 million contract he got to replace Mike D'Antoni, who left after four highly successful seasons to coach the New York Knicks.

Gentry, extremely popular with Suns players, has been a coach in the NBA for 20 years, including interim head coaching stints with Miami and Detroit. He was head coach of the Los Angeles Clippers from 2000 to 2003.

Gentry was the only holdover from D'Antoni's staff in Phoenix. His hiring as assistant coach in 2004 coincided with the arrival of Steve Nash and the subsequent ultra up-tempo offense that propelled the Suns to 54 wins or more for each of the past four seasons.

The decision to replace Porter came in a series of meetings between owner Robert Sarver and general manager Steve Kerr reviewing the entire basketball operation. The two are considering trading Stoudemire in a move designed to clear salary-cap space for future signings.

Chicago, Cleveland, Miami and Portland are among the teams mentioned as possible destinations for the Suns' power forward.

It marks the second time Porter has been fired as an NBA coach. He was let go by the Milwaukee Bucks in 2005 after two seasons.

Porter, who played in the NBA for 17 seasons, was an assistant with the Detroit Pistons when he was hired by the Suns, and the intention was for him to bring the Pistons' defense-oriented, slower playing style with him.

That plan was jettisoned after it became apparent the Suns' personnel was not suited to the slowdown game.

The promotion of Gentry means the Suns will be even more committed to a fast-paced game.

Phoenix (28-23) lost five of eight going into the All-Star break. The Suns trail Utah by one game for the eighth and final playoff spot in the West.

Earlier Sunday, Porter told The Associated Press he hadn't heard anything from his bosses.

"I know they're meeting tonight," he said. "They're reviewing the whole system."

Wind, rain end hopes of completing Pebble Pro-Am

PEBBLE BEACH, Calif. (AP)—Raging wind that toppled a 40-foot pine and rain that formed puddles on the green forced the PGA Tour to postpone the final round of the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am, giving it a Monday finish for the first time since 2000.

Tee times were pushed back six hours Sunday until another band of rain arrived on the Monterey Peninsula.

No one teed off, and there is no guarantee that the final round will be played Monday, when the forecast is for more rain and wind.

Dustin Johnson had a four-shot lead as he tries to join Anthony Kim as the only players under 25 with multiple PGA Tour victories. A victory would give the 24-year-old Johnson a spot in the Accenture Match Play Championship at the end of the month and the first two majors of the year, including the Masters.

"I'm ready to play," Johnson said. "Obviously, I'll be real ready to play tomorrow after sitting around for a little over a day, waiting to see what's going to happen."

The last Monday finish at Pebble Beach came in 2000, when Tiger Woods rallied to win from five shots behind, including a seven-shot deficit with seven holes to play. One year earlier, the late Payne Stewart had a one-shot lead through 54 holes when Sunday was washed out, and the tournament was cut short to 54 holes because of a storm system that stretched to Japan.

AP

A large pine tree that fell over the third hole fairway is shown at Pebble Beach Golf Links on Sunday, Feb. 15, 2009. A strong winter storm has moved across the Monterey Peninsula delaying the final round of the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro Am.

Mike Weir was four shots behind, in the final group at Pebble for the second time in four years, and wasn't ready to go anywhere.

"I want to play. I'm glad they made this decision," he said. "Today, tomorrow, doesn't matter. I'm here to try to win this tournament."

A forecast of wind and rain made it even more enticing for Weir, who might need some help from Johnson.

"It will be tough on everybody," Weir said. "It will be fun to see what happens. There might be some ugly golf out there, but it will be fun to see who can handle it."

Mark Russell, the PGA Tour tournament director at Pebble, said if half of the field completes the fourth round on Monday, the tour is required to complete all 72 holes no matter how long it takes.

"If we can get a little break in this rain ... we might be able to play," Russell said. "We're going to try."

Sunday was ominous from the start.

The wind was strong enough to knock down a 40-foot Monterey pine, which crossed part of the third fairway, and it blew over a small tower behind the 17th green used to measure shots with a laser.

Tee times first were delayed by two hours when a steady rain overnight soaked Pebble Beach.

Then, officials decided to cancel the final round of the pro-am, meaning there would not be any amateurs competing. That was done to reduce the field—68 pros made the cut—with hopes they could finish on Sunday. Tee times were pushed back another hour to redo the pairings, then three more hours after wind continue to knock down tents and rain returned, forming puddles on some of the greens and in the bunkers.

But even with occasional bursts of sunshine in the morning, the attention shifted to the wind. The forecast was for gusts up to 45 mph Sunday afternoon, raising questions whether the ball would stay still on the green.

Johnson opened the tournament with a 65 at Pebble Beach, a score that would be unlikely in these conditions. Pebble Beach is the easiest of the three courses in calm conditions, the most difficult in the wind.

The top 25 pro-am teams compete in the final round. The last time amateurs did not play on the final day of the tournament was in 1998, but there was a good reason—the final round was delayed nearly seven months, finishing in August, because of rain.

The pro-am cancellation meant Johnson and Joe Rice, an attorney, were declared the winner. They will have their names added to the plaque on the stone wall surrounding the first tee at Pebble Beach.

Johnson will have to wait until Monday to see if he gets the crystal trophy, too.

Catcher Ivan Rodriguez wants to play ball and avoid past

SUNNY ISLES BEACH, Fla. (AP)—Ivan Rodriguez looked as feisty as ever, explaining why he's physically and mentally ready to play baseball.

The 14-time All-Star catcher, though, is still looking for a place to play.

Rodriguez said he might sign soon with the Florida Marlins, Houston Astros or New York Mets.

Or, he might need to stay patient.

"I don't know where I'm going to play, but a team is going to win the lotto when I sign," Rodriguez said Sunday night in an interview with The Associated Press. "I still feel I can play three or four more years, to be honest, because of the way I take care of myself."

The way Rodriguez took care of himself in the past has been questioned, most notably by former teammate Jose Canseco.

Rodriugez's mood changed when that subject was broached during a wide-ranging interview in his 44th-floor apartment overlooking Miami Beach.

Is the 37-year-old star known as Pudge on the list of 104 players who tested positive for steroids during baseball's 2003 survey?

"Only God knows," Rodriguez said softly.

Canseco, a former teammate in Texas, has alleged he injected the steroids into Rodriguez.

Another former teammate, Alex Rodriguez, recently said he used performance-enhancing drugs while with the Rangers.

"Alex is a great guy, he's the best player in baseball and he's going to be OK," Ivan Rodriguez said. "People don't know how hard he works."

Alex Rodriguez said the culture of the game was different when he used drugs to improve his performance.

Ivan Rodriguez begrudgingly agreed.

"It happened and everybody has to move forward," he said.

Looking back, no one can match some of feats that Ivan Rodriguez has accomplished since his career began in 1991 with the Rangers.

He is the only player in baseball history with at least 13 Gold Gloves and a career .300 average or better.

He has three more Gold Gloves, earning one as recently as 2007, give him three more than Johnny Bench and almost double the total by Bob Boone, who is third on the list. Among position players, only Hall of Fame third baseman Brooks Robinson has more Gold Glove awards.

Rodriguez has caught 2,173 games, trailing only Carlton Fisk (2,226) and Boone (2,225) in terms of longevity behind the plate.

"Absolutely, I'd like to break Mr. Fisk's record," he said. "And, another goal is 3,000 hits.

"But really, my love of the game of baseball is what motivates me to work out five days a week to stay ready."

Rodriguez, who has 2,605 career hits, would likely have to play a few more seasons to join the 3,000-hit club.

And, he'd have to play much better than he did last season.

Rodriguez hit .295 in 82 games last season for the Detroit Tigers, then finished with a .276 batting average after struggling at the plate with the New York Yankees.

The Tigers dealt Rodriguez, who sparked the turnaround when he signed with them in 2004 after helping Florida win the World Series, and didn't re-sign him because they didn't think he was a No. 1 catcher and knew he disagreed.

"I still think I'm an everyday catcher and that's one of the things that disappoints me when I hear people say I can't play every day or I'm a part-time player," Rodriguez said with piercing eyes as the Atlantic Ocean crashed on the beach and dusk led to orange, yellow and shades of gray to fill the sky. "People don't know how hard it was on me to go through a divorce from my wife of 15 years and how much that drained me physically and mentally.

"But now, I've been happily married for two years to a great woman, my kids are great, my ex-wife is good. I just want to play baseball because I know I have a lot left in me."

While Rodriguez can't hit like he did in the past, his play behind the plate is still strong. His caught-stealing percentage ranked third in the AL last season after ranking fifth and first the previous two years, among catchers with a minimum of 600 innings behind the plate, according to STATS.

Rodriguez is excited to play for Puerto Rico at the World Baseball Classic next month, but he's eager to join a Major League Baseball team.

"It's hard to be sitting here at home a few days after pitchers and catchers reported," Rodriguez said. "I hear Florida, Houston and the Mets are trying to do some things to sign me.

"I would love to be with any team right now, but I can get ready quick because of the way my body and mind are prepared to play right now."

Rodriguez calls SI writer to apologize

TAMPA, Fla. (AP)—Alex Rodriguez has called *Sports Illustrated*'s Selena Roberts to apologize for critical comments he made during an ESPN interview.

Roberts was co-author of the Feb. 7 article on *SI*'s Web site that reported he was on a list of 104 players who tested positive for steroids during baseball's anonymous 2003 survey. Rodriguez told ESPN two days later that he had used banned substances from 2001-3 while playing for Texas.

"I know this lady from *Sports Illustrated*, Selena Roberts, is trying to throw things out there that in high school I tried steroids. I mean, that's the biggest bunch of baloney I've ever heard in my life," he told ESPN, adding that "this lady is coming out with all these allegations, all these lies."

Roberts said Sunday that Rodriguez called her last Wednesday. She didn't want to comment on the call until Rodriguez holds a news conference after arriving at spring training Tuesday.

She is writing a book "A-Rod: The Many Lives of Alex Rodriguez," due for publication by HarperCollins on April 14.

NMA finally fetes All Schools winners

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Outstanding athletes in the 2008 McDonald's All Schools Championships finally received their overdue trophies during the Northern Marianas Athletics Annual Awards Banquet at Minatchom Atdao Pavilion last week.

"It's better late than never," said NMA secretary general/treasurer Robin Sapong.

NMA president Kurt Barnes apologized for the delay, as they were busy preparing for the Oceania Grand Prix Series and Oceania Area Championships, which Saipan hosted in June last year.

The All Schools meet was held in May and featured athletes in the elementary, middle school, and high school competing in field and running events.

NMA was able to award team trophies to various schools, but failed to give awards to individual performers.

Ten individuals were named top performers in the All Schools meet.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Whispering Palms students, from left, Neghar Rastguiy, Ilia Corella, and Gabrielle Race show their trophies won during the 2008 McDonald's All Schools Championships.

The 8-and-under division had Whispering Palms' Neghar Rastguiy, who won in the 800m and 1,500m races, and Dandan Elementary School's Maxten Doone, who ruled the 100m and 200m races, and softball throw.

The top performers in the 10-and-under division were Gabrielle Race of Whispering Palms and Jesse Brel of Kagman Elementary School.

Race won the 400m and 800m races in the All Schools, while Brel triumphed in the 100m, 200m, and 800m runs.

Ilia Corella of Whispering Palms and Joshua Trinidad of San Vicente Elementary School were named best athletes in the 12-and-under division. Corella prevailed in the 200m and 400m runs and placed third in the long jump in the All Schools.

Lia Rangamar of Grace Christian Academy and Brandon Phillip of Hopwood Junior High earned the top athletes plum in the 14-and-under age group.

Rangamar was first in 200m and 400m races, discus throw, and javelin throw, while Phillip triumphed in the 100m and 200m runs, and long jump.

The top athletes in the 18-and-under division were all from Kagman—Yvonne Bennett and Jesus Iguel.

Bennett made record-breaking runs in the 100m, 200m, and 400m, while Iguel won the 100m and 200m races, long jump, and javelin throw.

NMA thanked McDonald's owner Jo Ayuyu for his continued support for the All Schools meet.

Patriots debut with easy win against Red Sox

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

The powerhouse Patriots won their debut in the Junior League after walloping the Red Sox, 13-4, yesterday in the 2009 Saipan Little League Baseball at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios Ballfield.

Champions for the last three years in the Major League, the Patriots moved up an age group this year and have established themselves as one of the early favorites in the Senior League.

"We don't really know our chances. This is our first time in the Juniors but we will do our best," said team manager Thelma Mizer minutes after the game.

Mizer's coaching staff includes Major League holdover Manny Sablan and newcomer William Camacho.

The Patriots, however, face an acid test in its next assignment when it takes on defending champion Kagman Lion Heart.

But Mizer said they have been preparing hard for this season.

"We are an all-around team. I think we have a strong defense. It's all about teamwork,' she said.

Franklin Santos led the Patriots' in offense with four runs, Christian Mizer scored three, Jeremy Rabauliman and Bryan Camacho added two each, while Austin Lizama and Henry Rabauliman had one each.

The Patriots joined opening day winner San Roque D'9ers, who won via forfeit against Fielders.

The opening game in the Juniors League between Kagman Lion Heart and Ol'Aces ended in a 5-5 count, but the game was called off due to time constraints.

That game will be played at a later date.

Jets 5, Fielders 4

Also on Sunday, the Jets prevailed over the Fielders, 4-3, in a defense-oriented encounter in the Senior League.

This game went into extra innings as both teams ended in a 3-3 all count after seven innings of play.

Outfielder Thomas Camacho, who had one run in the seventh, made the decisive run in the ninth for the Jets.

Henry Nakayama also finished with two runs in the second and sixth, while Eli Aughenbaugh had one in the sixth.

Fielders third baseman Jonathan Celis scored in the bottom of first to give his team an early lead. Noki Saralu and Jo Sablan each scored in the sixth, while Tom Agulto tied it at 4-all in the seventh to force overtime.

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fied their intention to participate include former Tagaman champion Julie Dibens, three-time XTERRA Championship winner Renata Bucher, Shonny Vanlandingham, Jim McConnell, Allan Collinson, Mike Vine, Taro Shirato, and Ulli Katzer.

He said Bucher and Collinson have confirmed that they will be doing the PIC Double, which would mean they would compete in both the XTERRA Saipan Championship and Tagaman Triathlon.

Bucher and Vine will also be conducting clinics free of charge to the public.

"This is a great opportunity for local athletes to get some advice and tips on training, nutrition, equipment, and other aspects of competition in sports," Mojica said.

The XTERRA Saipan Championship will be held on April 18, while the Tagaman Triathlon will be on April 25.

"This is the premier event of the Western Pacific sports activities and will bring many people from all over the world to our beautiful island," said Mojica.

Bucher, who is from Switzerland, won last year's PIC Double women's division by sweeping both the XTERRA and the Tagaman triathlons.

Last year's men's division champion Andrew Noble of Australia also wants to come back and defend his title in both XTERRA and Tagaman.

This would be the eighth year for the annual event that draws competitors from as far as Europe, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, and Saipan. The XTERRA Saipan Championship is considered the crown jewel of the XTERRA Global Tour, and the Tagaman Triathlon, the longest-running endurance race in the western Pacific

Noble's combined time from the two races was 5:41:16, while Bucher won her second PIC Double in three years with a total time of 6:38:20. She also won the same event in 2005.

The XTERRA Saipan Championship will be 1.5-kilometer swim, 30-km bike, and 12-km run, while the Tagaman has a distance of 2 km in the swim, 60 km in the bike, and 15 km in the run.

A side event will be the Saipan Sportsfest that will also feature the annual Sophia Walk, an XTERRA bike race, and the Taga Kids.

Individuals, groups, or agencies wanting to serve as volunteers during these two biggest triathlon events on Saipan may contact Mojica for more details at 236-2540 or 483-4274.

BACK-TO-BACK

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student had an average of 190.25 pinfalls, knocking more than 200 pins in Game 1 (208) and 3 (224). He had 169 in the second game, before slowing down in the last with 160 pinfalls.

Marion McKenzie, who was third last month, performed better this month placing second with his 658 pinfalls. McKenzie's best game was in Games 3 (178). He netted 159 in Game 2, 154 in Game 3, and 167 in Game 4 for an average of 164.5.

Reigning Prince of the Lanes Zack Cruz settled for third with his total 655 pinfalls. Cruz started slow recording only 124 pinfalls in Game 1. He found his form in Game 2 with his 186 pinfalls and closed out in the 170s in the last two games (175 and 179) for an average of 163.75.

Six other youth keglers joined the February roll-off. They were Nikko Gutierrez (589), Leeanne Yarobwemal (571), Troy Verdaguer (524), Shelley Sablan (521), Marcel McKenzie (398), and Toby Verdaguer (369).

In the Budweiser King and Queen of the Lanes Tenpin Bowling Tournament, Percy Omechelang boosted his chances for a second monthly plum after leading Sunday's roll-off.

Omechelang took the January title after beating the score of first day leader Raymond Zapanta. This month, Omechelang was the first day leader with his 835 pinfalls in four games. If his score went undefeated in last night's roll-off, Omechelang gets to keep the February award.

Participants in the King and Queen roll-offs have an option to bowl twice [Sunday and Monday], but only the highest score is counted.

Behind by 43 pinfalls was first day second placer Rusty Musca (791), followed by Kitz Barja (777), Edward Baluyan (764), Raymond Zapanta (756), Jon Eparwa (734), Ray Cruz (700), Simon Manacop (698), Robert Talavera (698), Jorge Soledad (686), Ariel Dumapit (682), Wellington Ang (618), Jared Guitierrez (602), Raymond Angeles (583), Tony Yarobwemal (572).

The first day of the Queen of the Lanes race was a close battle with Ron Cal ahead by only one pinfall against January winner Yho Villavicencio.

Cal saved the best for last making 202 pinfalls in Game 4 for a total of 703 pinfalls. She had 137, 169, and 195 in the first three games for an average of 175.75.

Villavicencio totaled 702 pinfalls, tallying 181 in Game 1, 157 in Game 2, 180 in Game 3, and 184 in Game 4.

Others who joined the first day of the January roll-offs were Diane Camacho (700), Diane Chong (686), Gloria Omechelang (661), Elena Soll (639). Linda Yarobwemal (631), Mindy Taitano (590), Gigi Zapanta (589), Eileen Schardt (565), and Cora Muna (503).

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NBA LEADERS

SCORING

	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
James, Clev.	51	508	369	1455	28.5
Wade, Mia.	52	533	360	1470	28.3
Bryant, LAL	52	522	324	1438	27.7
Nowitzki, Dall.	51	483	311	1321	25.9
Durant, OKC.	52	473	313	1328	25.5
Granger, Ind.	50	412	312	1270	25.4
Jefferson, Minn.	50	485	186	1156	23.1
Bosh, Tor.	51	401	349	1160	22.7
Roy, Port.	48	389	262	1091	22.7
Harris, N.J.	47	316	349	1023	21.8
Johnson, Atl.	50	399	182	1078	21.6
Jamison, Wash.	53	428	208	1133	21.4
Paul, N.O.	46	332	280	981	21.3
Stoudemire, Phoe.	51	380	306	1069	21.0
Carter, N.J.	52	376	238	1084	20.8
Duncan, S.A.	50	406	227	1039	20.8
Howard, Orl.	49	348	310	1006	20.5
Butler, Wash.	48	351	232	984	20.5
Gordon, Chi.	53	374	217	1083	20.4
Harrington, N.Y	44	325	135	890	20.2

FG PERCENTAGE

	FG	FGA	PCT
Nene, Den.	289	474	.610
O'Neal, Phoe.	285	488	.584
Okafor, Char.	290	498	.582
Biedrins, G.S.	268	472	.568
Lee, N.Y.	342	606	.564
Howard, Orl.	348	617	.564
Gasol, LAL	354	632	.560
Bynum, LAL	254	455	.558
Millsap, Utah	274	500	.548
Yao, Hou.	355	652	.544

REBOUNDS

	G	OFF	DEF	TOT	AVG
Howard, Orl.	49	215	475	690	14.1
Camby, LAC	43	133	415	548	12.7
Lee, N.Y.	52	166	447	613	11.8
Biedrins, G.S.	50	199	389	588	11.8
Murphy, Ind.	49	89	471	560	11.4
Jefferson, Minn.	50	172	376	548	11.0
Okafor, Char.	52	193	366	559	10.8
Duncan, S.A.	50	133	392	525	10.5
Yao, Hou.	50	142	337	479	9.6
Bosh, Tor.	51	133	353	486	9.5

ASSISTS

	G	AST	AVG
Paul, N.O.	46	496	10.8
Williams, Utah	39	391	10.0
Nash, Phoe.	46	449	9.8
Calderon, Tor.	41	347	8.5
Rondo, Bos.	55	465	8.5
Kidd, Dall.	52	438	8.4
B. Davis, LAC	39	317	8.1
Duhon, N.Y.	51	408	8.0
James, Clev.	51	359	7.0
Wade, Mia.	52	365	7.0

By The Associated Press

LITTLE

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up to finish off the Survivors.

The game was close after two innings, but Ol'Aces busted out in the third courtesy of plate-crossings by Jon Santos, Garon Borja, and Jesse Brel.

Ol'Aces scored three more in the fourth and six in the fifth for the outright win.

Pitcher Jeremy Lizama struck out a total of 12 batters as only one Survivor was able to advance to first base on a walk.

Red Sox 9, Tanapag Braves 1

Red Sox also marched to victory after a dominating 9-1 win over the Tanapag Braves.

Red Sox pitchers Alex Monkeya and Keene Guerrero issued a total of 11 strikeouts against the Braves.

Jose Tyquiengco led the offense with three runs, Nathan Sablan and Monkeya had two each, while Ryan Aguon, Jonathan Camacho, and Jean Aguon added one each.

Only Ked Kalen reached home plate for the Braves in the bottom fourth.

Hustlers also won over the Dragons, 7-4.

Three other games were played yesterday—A's vs. Team Shell, Team IT&E vs. Jets, and JPO Enforcers vs. Little Falcons—but results were not available as of press time.

2009 Saipan Little League Opening

PHOTOS By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.

The Big League's Team Aztecs, sponsored by Rep. Edward T. Salas, pose for a photo.

The Senior League's Jets is sponsored by Juan S. Tenorio of JET Holdings and Jim Gabhard of Pacific Amusement.

Junior League's Patriots is sponsored by Rosal Zest Enterprises and AMC Our Heroes for Our Freedom.

Junior League's Red Sox is sponsored by Bank of Saipan.

Major League's Little Falcons is sponsored by UMDA.

The Senior League's Ol'Aces is sponsored by Juan S. Tenorio.

The Twins' Roke Tenorio tripled then scored in this play against Little Lions catcher Francisco Palacios but the Lions won the game on the second day of action in the Major League yesterday at the Miguel "Tan Ge" Pangelinan Baseball Field.

Senior League's Fielders is sponsored by Tan Holdings Corp.

Ol'Aces' Jonah Flores is congratulated by teammate Frankie Camacho after scoring the first run of the season against Kagman Lion Heart.

Ol'Aces batter Frankie Camacho grounds out to first base against Kagman Lion Heart's Arthur Sablan during the opening game of the Junior League season.

Shaq, Kobe winners again in All-Star game

Shaq danced, Kobe dazzled. And just like old times, they won again.

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Saipan Tribune
Sports

NMA finally fetes All Schools winners

Outstanding athletes in the 2008 McDonald's All Schools Championships finally received their overdue trophies during the Northern Marianas Athletics Annual Awards Banquet at Minatchom Atdao Pavilion last week. 26

Graf breaks mark in Meek & Mighty

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Cooper Graf splashed to a record win in the 4th Annual Saipan Swim Club Meek & Mighty Ocean Swim held Saturday in the waters off the Pacific Island Club.

Graf timed in 1:02 in the 5,000-meter Mighty swim, shattering his own mark of 1:03.16, which he posted in last year's edition of the annual event.

After he crossed the finish line, Graf's mother Linda greeted the swimmer and told volunteers of her son's "motivation" for the race.

"Now he won, there's a reason to grant his request [a ring]," the Linda said.

The Saipan International School student outraced eight other participants in the longest race of the day, which required swimmers to round the course five times in early morning breeze.

Checking in at second place was Lester Lapuz, who finished the race in 1:08:00, while Grace Kimball was third overall and the first female out of the water with her time of 1:10:27.

Michael Moran submitted a time of 1:10:37 to rank fourth, followed by Carol Lynn Pierce (1:20:12), Junior Pamaran (1:20:18), and Hiroabi Miskio (1:21:13).

Andrew Kimball joined the race, but was bitten by a fish and decided not to finish the event after competing his third turn of the course.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Cooper Graf, left, and Maxi Braig topped the 4th Annual Saipan Swim Club Meek & Mighty Ocean Swim last Saturday off the waters of Pacific Islands Club.

In the student vs. teacher race in the 1,000-meter Meek division, Maxi Braig defeated SSC coach Michael Villagomez with the former clocking in at 24:04 against the latter's 24:14.

Matthew Klassen timed in at 25:34 for third overall, but was first among the four members of his family to finish the race. Father Rod recorded 29:43 to place 12th, while mother Karen and sibling Andrew posted identical times of 33:59.

Melanie Daly was the first female finisher in the 1,000m race with her time of 26:21.

Other participants in the shortest race of the day and their times were Bryce Daly (27:31), Kento Akimaru (27:32), Jeff Taylor (27:45), Joshua Berger (28:24), Shogo Ando (29:43), Lewie Tenorio (29:32), Fred Camacho (29:37), Ryu Tanzawa (33:54), Kathryn Barry (37:22).

Kieran Daly and Abigail Martinsen kept each other company in the 3,000-meter race and emerged the top two finishers in the Tweener division.

Daly and Martinsen appeared out of the water almost at the same time, but the older Daly reached the finish line on the PIC shore first at 46:22. Martinsen came in second, but was the first female finisher with her time of 46:22.

Other participants in the Tweener race were Suzy Kindell (52:56), Florian Braig (1:01:44), Keanna Villagomez (1:02:33), Tatiana Calvo (1:02:41), and Matthew Mancao (1:07:20).

Little Lions struggle to defeat Twins

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

Kagman Little Lions nipped As Matuis Twins, 9-8, in the second day of action in the 2009 Saipan Little League Baseball Association yesterday of at the Miguel "Tan Ge" Pangelinan Ballfield.

With the win, the Little Lions joined three other teams in the Major Division that also won their first assignments in opening day held Sunday, including Hustlers, Red Sox, and Ol'Aces.

Jon Santos led the Little Lions' offense with a run in the first, third, and sixth, while Roke Tenorio also had three runs for the Twins.

Coach Wally Emul said his players have improved a lot.

"We've been hitting good. Our defense was also good. We work hard to make things happen," he said, who also handles the defending champion Lion Heart in the Junior Division and the Lion King in the Senior Division.

NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.

Kagman Little Lions pitcher Jon Santos readies to pitch against an As Matuis Twins batter in the sixth inning of their game in the Major Division of 2009 Saipan Little League.

RELATED NEWS

Patriots debut with easy win against Red Sox

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Their next assignment will be against the Survivors on Saturday.

Emul said the Ol'Aces would be the team to beat this season.

His prediction came true after the Ol'Aces proved their dominance in their first game of the season.

Ol'Aces 11, Survivors 0

Ol'Aces blanked Survivors, 11-0, on Sunday in an abbreviated match due to the 10-run rule.

Nathan Torres stepped at home plate three times to lead Ol'Aces' offensive juggernaut, one each in the third, fourth, and fifth, as they needed only five innings in the seven-inning match-

see LITTLE on Page 26

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

February Fiji Water Prince of the Lanes Raphael Zapanta is flanked by runner-up Marion McKenzie, right, and third placer Zack Cruz, left during the awards ceremony for Sunday's roll-off at the Saipan Bowling Center.

Back-to-back wins for Zapanta

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Raphael Zapanta has started a streak in the Fiji Water Prince/Princess of the Lanes Tenpin BowlingTournament, topping the February roll-off Sunday at the Saipan Bowling Center.

Zapanta knocked down a total of 761 in four games to win the February plum, his second monthly title after ruling the January tournament. Counting last year's last three roll-offs, Zapanta has yet to lose in the last five monthly roll-offs.

The Saipan Southern High School

see BACK-TO-BACK on Page 26

8 pros from Europe, Japan confirm for Saipan XTERRA

By NAZARIO RODRIGUEZ JR.
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REPORTER

Seven professional triathletes from Europe and one from Japan have already confirmed their participation in the 2009 XTERRA Saipan Championship slated this April, according to the latest update from Taga Inc. president Wolf Mojica.

Mojica said the eight pros who have signi-

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